



# Ancient Apologetic Exegesis

*Introducing and Recovering  
Theophilus's World*

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Stuart E. Parsons

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Theophilus's World*

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## Preface

ONLY A CENTURY AFTER the apostles, the growing Christian movement appeared similar in many ways to its present-day forms. It displayed great religious vitality. Many followers of the Nazarene maintained steadfast commitment to his lordship, this during a period of sudden, unexpected persecutions. Yet in other ways, it differed greatly. While there was a common commitment to certain core beliefs and associated worship traditions, as attested in Clement's "rule of our tradition," Irenaeus's "canon of truth," and Tertullian's "rule of faith," it engendered at the same time a wide spectrum of theological forces unique to that age.<sup>1</sup> Truly, a distinctive type of Christianity flourished in the age of the early Christian apologists. Not surprisingly, distinctive strains of exegesis pervaded that period. But today, these distinctive habits of exegesis of that distant apologetic age lie forgotten and hidden behind our own anachronistic assumptions. Along with introducing the general shape of one of these strains of ancient apologetic exegesis, its recovery is the aim of this study. Much of our literature discounts the exegesis of Theophilus and other early Christian apologists as a mysterious disgrace. But by probing their culture, we rediscover a forgotten form of exegesis.

We might assume that a forgotten form of exegesis is only a secondary matter for our understanding of early Christianity. But this assumption would lead us astray. In reality, Scripture and exegesis of it are tightly and inseparably tied to the Christian message. At the beginning of his best-selling volume, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, Robert Louis Wilken discusses how extensively early Christianity transformed Western civilization. As one of his generation's foremost specialists on early Christianity who has invested a lifetime of scholarship on the intellectual world of the early church, Wilken would know. After considering aspects of early Christianity which powered its wide cultural impact, he writes, "But what has impressed

1. <sup>1</sup> *Clem.* 8.2; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1; 2.28.1; 3.12.6–7; Tertullian, *Apology* 47.

me most is the omnipresence of the Bible in early Christian writings.”<sup>2</sup> The Bible profoundly shaped early Christian life and thought, and changed the intellectual flow of Western culture.

Unfortunately, while Scripture was central in the experience of the early church, its function in the age of the early Christian apologists who lived only a few generations after the days of Jesus himself remains either little understood or else, typically misunderstood. Modern critics tend to forget significant realities of that age. The extant writings of Theophilus of Antioch, bishop of the capitol city of the eastern province of the Roman Empire a century after the apostles, can serve as vehicles for exposing these forgotten realities. Expose them we must, for current literature often misunderstands or dismisses second-century exegesis. My thesis is that when we look behind anachronistic views of ancient genre, literacy, and rhetoric, we discover a hidden Theophilus and a forgotten form of second-century exegesis.

Notice that I do not claim that the distinctive mode of exegesis practiced by Theophilus and other second-century apologists who dialogued with Greco-Roman pagan religionists was employed by every single early Christian apologist in a monolithic sense. As my argument unfolds, it will become clear, particularly in chapter 4, that the intended audience of the apology makes all the difference in the world. But Theophilus’s audience was unavoidable and addressed by numerous other Christians. We shall see that while his exegesis was only one of several pervading the early apologetic age, it was nonetheless important, even essential, in the face of Greco-Roman religious pressures.

Second-century Christians responded to challenges from their pagan neighbors by defending their faith through protreptic writings. The ancient protreptic genre consisted of exhortation to abandon an inferior philosophy or manner of living in order to adopt a superior one. The protreptic genre is foreign to our modern age, but it was common in late antiquity. While specialists may acknowledge the protreptic genre of various early Christian writings, they often fail to consider seriously ancient expectations about protreptic writings. As a result, they import historically-dubious theological criticisms that misunderstand the actual purposes of ancient protreptic writings. They also fail to discover the biblical justifications that early Christians constructed for their protreptic efforts. So in chapter 2, I examine functional dynamics of Scripture in this now largely-forgotten genre. To this end, I demonstrate that Theophilus intentionally withheld soteriology from *Ad Autolyicum*, which is presently a disputed point in scholarly

2. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, xvii.

literature. Present-day confusion on this point owes to modern blindness to an ancient genre that may be unfamiliar to modern eyes but was most prominent in the apologetic age. Concerning this point, it may seem that I perform theological renovation of *Ad Autolyicum*, but that impression is false. Rather, I merely call scholarship to give up rash and anachronistic theological judgments of Theophilus and other early apologists, and take a more historically appropriate “agnostic” view of soteriology in their pro-treptic writings in light of their genre. I also will show Theophilus’s own carefully-constructed exegetical and theological justifications for his pro-treptic writings. There was a very specific intent that shaped the ways that the early Christian apologists used Scripture, but it is one that is only seen when we take seriously a now-forgotten literary genre.

In Gospel studies, James D. G. Dunn and others have broken through an impasse produced by the blindness of our own highly-literate, modern world to the pervasiveness of illiteracy in late antiquity and to the great memory abilities of oral cultures. But unfortunately, this sensitivity has not penetrated much into studies about patristic exegesis. In chapter 3, I show what such a sensitivity reveals about the function of Scripture in the apologetic age, the age of the early Christian apologists beginning in the late first century but whose heyday was the second century. In this regard, we shall see several insights about how Scripture functioned amid the high illiteracy of that apologetic age. For one thing, we will find that even though Theophilus himself likely could read and write, he used Scripture in ways that resonated powerfully for those many illiterate members of his flock. We will also find that much of the time, he retrieved biblical passages by memory. Thus, he modeled a life fixated on Scripture even for those who could not read. We will also discover subtle indications that his biblical arguments rested *mainly* on portions of Scripture that he did *not* quote, portions that only those who habitually carried their Bibles not between the covers of a book, but rather in their memories, would recognize. In short, we will find that the majority of his uses of Scripture remain hidden from readers who must rely on written texts. In Theophilus’s writings, quoted biblical phrases are only the “tip of the iceberg.” The great mass lies beneath. We shall see some examples of what lies below the surface. By these examples of powerful biblical arguments based on passages that are not quoted at all, but which come automatically to the minds of those who retrieve Scripture by memory, I will expose biblical dynamics in the largely-oral culture of the apologetic age, dynamics powered not by biblical quotations, but rather, by allusions and reminiscences. Like a “mouse that roared,” these seemingly insignificant uses of Scripture, largely ignored in much of the literature about patristic exegesis, often resound more loudly than the more prominent quotations.

In so doing, I will also provide a call for further research in a new direction, even if space does not allow a complete survey all of the plenteous allusions and reminiscences in Theophilus's writings. The culmination of these examples of "what lies below the surface" will be a comprehensive treatment of the Book of Job in Theophilus's extant works. This comprehensive treatment of Job will serve as a capstone for this chapter, a programmatic example of taking orality and memory seriously in studies of the apologetic age.

Present-day scholars of patristic exegesis are starting to avoid anachronistic errors of prior research partly by remembering the rhetorical world of late antiquity. While this remembrance may seem quite familiar in the eyes of NT scholars, it is nonetheless fresh and exciting to present-day patrologists.<sup>3</sup> This approach is sorely needed for investigating early Christian apologists such as Theophilus. Like some of his fellow apologists, he has often been regarded as a disorganized writer who did not understand very much of Christian teaching. But this typical view of him is the very opposite of historical reality. I argue in chapter 4 that despite prior claims of scholarship, there was a masterful coherence running throughout every section of *Ad Autolyicum*, built upon ancient judicial rhetoric in which Scripture played an absolutely essential and most central role. And his use of ancient rhetoric was inseparably intertwined with his use of Scripture in a way that may be unique to the apologetic age. Although his particular use of ancient rhetoric in essential concert with Scripture formed only one of several exegetical strains in that age, it may have been among the most prominent.

This study will unfold cultural features underlying the connections between Scripture and Theophilus's protreptic moves, his orality, and coherence. These cultural features obviously touched others besides Theophilus himself. They extended beyond his lifetime and beyond the city of Antioch. They were the coinage of late antiquity. It would be difficult to maintain that other apologists living in that age of high illiteracy did not also participate in the protreptic, largely-oral, and rhetorical world described herein.

I will also deal with media through which Theophilus accessed Scripture when I discuss his use of biblical anthologies and testimonia in a later chapter. To my knowledge, we have yet to see any published scholarship

3. However, this rhetorical-critical approach is nonetheless indeed healthy and alive in NT studies, and is by no means overworn. Fresh examples of this approach continually emerge even in fairly recent NT scholarship, as seen for example in Litfin's 1994 volume, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, and Long's 2008 contribution, *Ancient Rhetoric and Paul's Apology*.

Within patristic scholarship, the emergence of this new portrait of patristic exegesis is truly still ongoing, as evidenced for example by Greer and Mitchell's 2007 volume, *The "Belly-Myther" of Endor*, as well as by the focus on ancient epideictic rhetoric in Mitchell's 2002 book on Chrysostom's use of Pauline Scripture, *Heavenly Trumpet*.

focusing on Theophilus's use of biblical testimonia. We shall see that his fairly sparse use of these tools confirms insights in chapter 3 about Scripture's function in the highly-illiterate world where Theophilus served. While his elders often leaned on biblical anthologies and testimony sources, he was of a new generation that found little need for them.

In this regard, I will also describe a new electronic computational approach that overcomes the practical limitations of the manual methods which have been employed until now for comprehensively detecting use of testimonia and testimony sources in ancient writings. Manual methods are practically-speaking unable to discover many of the more obscure biblical testimonia collections. There are simply too many sections of the hundreds of ancient Jewish and Christian works that must be examined in order to find all of the patterns of Scripture usage that may indicate that writers used a testimonia collection. In connection with Theophilus of Antioch, over four hundred treatises must be examined.<sup>4</sup> There are dozens of thousands of treatise sections that must be examined, each one for over a thousand combinations of biblical passages used in combination. Besides exact matches of Scripture use, near-matches, plus or minus a few verses, are also important. In the end, hundreds of millions of Scripture use comparisons must be made for any investigation approaching comprehensiveness.<sup>5</sup> The sheer mass of these necessary comparisons overwhelm manual methods. As a result, truly comprehensive searches for all testimonia traditions influencing a writer are rarely, if ever, done. However, this new electronic approach, using custom software and a massive database of biblical references, can accurately perform the hundreds of millions of necessary comparisons in a reasonable amount of time. This electronic computational approach ushers in a new era in biblical testimonia studies.

4. For the specific treatises, see the appendix section, "List of Treatises Searched by the Application for Computerized Testimonia Searches (ACTS)."

5. These numbers are discussed in more detail prior to the discussion of this new electronic method.

# Acknowledgments

I REMAIN IN DEBT to M. James Sawyer, my first theology professor, who sparked my interest in the field, and to my Doktorvater, D. Jeffrey Bingham, now serving Wheaton College, who fanned that initial spark and guided me towards the warm luminance of second-century studies. Professor Bingham not only directed my early explorations of *Ad Autolyicum*, he also put Theophilus into my sights at the very start. I am also grateful to Christopher Spinks and the editorial team at Pickwick Publications for their careful labors.

I also extend grateful appreciation to the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* for permission to republish an essay, with some minor corrections and refinements, as chapter 4 in this present work. It originally appeared as:

Parsons, Stuart E. "Coherence, Rhetoric, and Scripture in Theophilus of Antioch's *Ad Autolyicum*." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 53, no. 1–4 (2008) 155–222.

This analysis has also been enriched by assorted members of the North American Patristics Society, especially Everett Ferguson, a past president, who all kindly and skillfully offered feedback on earlier presentations of various portions over the last ten years or so. Similar to the sweeping transformation of a lowly caterpillar into a butterfly, this study has developed rather radically over the past decade in its structure and its details, I think for the better. I alone am responsible for its weaknesses.

# Abbreviations

ACTS	Application for Computerized Testimonia Searches
<i>Autol.</i>	<i>Ad Autolyicum</i>
BAGD	Bauer, Walter, et al. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur</i> . 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BG	Berlin Gnostic codex
LXX	Septuagint Greek Old Testament
NHC	Nag Hammadi codex
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies (formerly Nag Hammadi Studies)
NS	New Series
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>PGL</i>	Lampe, Geoffrey W. H. <i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1961.

# 1

## Theophilus and His Life with Scripture

**T**HE GREAT BODY OF New Testament scholarship uncovers much about first-century Christian thinking and experience. Brilliant Christian writers such as Origen, the Cappadocians, and Augustine draw scholarly attention to the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. But oddly, despite this flood of attention to both the first century and to the third to fifth centuries, the second century often escapes notice, despite its almost living memory of Jesus and his apostles from only a generation or two prior. Yet we bypass the second century only to our own loss.

Theophilus was one of the foremost second-century Christian leaders, bishop of the church at Antioch, capital city of the eastern province of the Roman Empire. We know little of his life. In what little of his writings that survive, he mentioned that at one time he did not believe in the possibility of resurrection, but he later changed his mind and that by encountering the Jewish Scriptures, he came to believe in the God of whom they spoke.<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, the ancient church historian, mentions Theophilus's service as the sixth bishop of Antioch. He and Jerome thought well of Theophilus's writings against various heresies. Jerome mentions various writings by the bishop which he considered quite suitable for building up the church. Sadly, virtually all of Theophilus's writings named by Eusebius and Jerome are now lost.<sup>2</sup>

1. Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 1.14.

2. Helpful introductory overviews of Theophilus are provided in Parsons, "Theophilus of Antioch"; Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:236–42; and Zeegers, "Theophilus von Antiochien."

The second century was a dangerous time to be a Christian. Local persecutions sometimes arose unexpectedly and with little warning. One infamous local persecution was in the year 177 C. E., close to when Theophilus wrote his third letter to Autolycus, when the Romans executed the elderly overseer of the church in Lyons and some of his flock.

Martyrdom was not sought, and Christians were to flee persecution if they could. But if they were taken, they were frequently given a choice of renouncing Christianity and worshipping the emperor in exchange for freedom, or else suffering public torture and death. Christians encouraged one another to remain steadfast, since they regarded it better to suffer the brief tortures of the Romans and receive the reward of eternal life, than to escape Roman torture only to face an eternity of suffering.

The most renowned of the martyrs of Lyons was not a member of the clergy or a prominent citizen, but a humble slave girl named Blandina. She was not expected to remain very steadfast because she was small and weak. The crowd in the amphitheater was therefore astounded to observe that Blandina lasted so long under successive tortures. Her endurance encouraged her companions, and ultimately encouraged Christians throughout Asia Minor who read of her sufferings when an eyewitness account came to them.<sup>3</sup>

When she would not recant her faith, Blandina was hung from a stake, in a rather fitting way given her religious identity, as if she were hanging from a cross. Dangerous beasts were released around her, but they did not attack. At the end of the day, she was taken back to prison. Again she was brought into the arena. There, before the crowds, she was successively whipped, exposed before dangerous animals, and baked on a large skillet (*τήγανον*) over a fire.<sup>4</sup> Rather than renounce her faith, she confessed her allegiance to Christ and her own innocence of wrong-doing. Finally, she was enclosed inside a net so that she could be repeatedly tossed and gored to death by a bull.

Not too long after the torture and execution of Blandina, Theophilus complained to his pagan Roman friend Autolycus that Christians were being persecuted unto death daily.<sup>5</sup> In light of the severity and recurrence of Roman persecution, it would not have been surprising if Theophilus had adopted a bitter or fearful tone toward Roman non-Christians, or if he had refused to correspond with any of them.

3. Extracts of the eyewitness account are preserved in Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.1.

4. While Eusebius spelled the term *τήγανον*, the alternate spelling *τάγηνον* appears in some other ancient writings.

5. Justin made a similar complaint only a few decades prior. See *Dialogue* 18.

It is therefore surprising to find Theophilus a decade or two before the end of the second century sending three treatise-length letters to his pagan friend Autolytus.<sup>6</sup> With these letters, he endeavored to persuade Autolytus to forsake worship of Greco-Roman gods and to embrace Christianity. These three letters are collectively entitled *Ad Autolytum*, or in English, “To Autolytus.” As for Autolytus, none of his letters or other writings survive.

It is not unreasonable to think that this correspondence between Theophilus and Autolytus was genuine and more than a mere literary invention, although such invention was not impossible. At any rate, it is likely that the content of *Ad Autolytum* accurately reflects actual Christian/pagan dialogues. Neymeyr shows that Christian teachers in the second century were in fairly harmonious contact with churches, but also had frequent interaction with non-Christians as they answered questions during their public lectures. Therefore, Theophilus would likely have been well aware of specific challenges to Christian teaching from Greco-Roman religionists, not only those which he learned directly via friendships with non-Christians such as Autolytus, but also those he learned second-hand from Christian teachers and others in his community who also dialogued with non-Christians.<sup>7</sup>

In Theophilus’s three letters to Autolytus, he exhibited neither anger, bitterness, nor fear towards Autolytus on account of Roman persecution

6. Scholarship has followed Harnack’s view that the final letter of *Ad Autolytum* was composed sometime shortly prior to the death of Emperor Commodus, since its chronology records the deaths of Commodus’s predecessors but not his own (*Autol.* 3.27). However, Erbes disputes Harnack’s claim that Theophilus would not have omitted Commodus’ death if it had already occurred. According to Erbes, Theophilus did not want to record up to the present. He only desired to explain major currents of history. Recent events were not relevant to his purposes. Erbes mentions that Eusebius similarly excluded recent entries from his bishop chronicle (Erbes, “Lebenszeit des Hippolytus,” 630–31; Harnack, “Theophilus von Antiochien und das Neue Testament,” 1–21). Accordingly, Erbes argues that *Ad Autolytum* was written relatively late, no earlier than 200 C.E., since Clement did not know it circa 200–202, and since Theophilus’s statements about persecution appear to reference persecutions of 203 C.E. (Erbes, “Lebenszeit des Hippolytus,” 630). However, this argument by Erbes has not been accepted by most scholars. One indication that Theophilus was concerned not merely with major historical events but also with recent details appears at the end of *Autol.* 3.27, where he meticulously recorded reigns of recent emperors such as Titus, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, and Verus. Since his chronology is not only quite comprehensive but also very detailed, even including many recent emperors, it is likely that he meant to treat the entire range of history. Also, a comprehensive history would well satisfy his explicit (*Autol.* 3.1) goal to demonstrate inadequacies of pagan chronologies.

7. Neymeyr, “Christliche Lehre im 2. Jahrhundert,” 158–62.

against Christians.<sup>8</sup> While he sharply critiqued Greco-Roman religious ideas in the letters, he nonetheless maintained a friendly tone towards Autolyclus.<sup>9</sup>

This is not the only surprise that we find in *Ad Autolyclus*. In his entire defense of Christianity, he did not once mention Jesus by name in reference to the historical Christ.<sup>10</sup> Nor did he discourse on the earthly ministry of the historical Christ, the Incarnation, or the Cross. Neither did he emphasize the theme of divine grace. Not only so, the organization of *Ad Autolyclus* sometimes appears curious, haphazard, and somehow less than adequate to the modern reader. For these reasons, Theophilus has been regarded by various scholars as being a disorganized writer who did not understand very much of Christian teaching.

However, this stereotypical picture of him is deceptive. Actually, he contended for his faith in a sophisticated and sure way according to the conventions of *his* age. If we truly grasp the protreptic form of his letters, we would be better able to comprehend his actual thought. And even if modern readers are sometimes unimpressed with the structure of *Ad Autolyclus*, it would have made a second-century rhetor proud. And we shall see that Scripture played a central, fairly unique, and essential role in this truly brilliantly-conceived structure.<sup>11</sup> If we miss the ancient rhetorical role of Scripture in *Ad Autolyclus*, we misunderstand Theophilus himself.

8. For critical editions, modern language translations of *Ad Autolyclus*, and important studies of it, see Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 1:472–73; Quasten, *Patrology*, 1:236–42; Zeegers, “Theophilus von Antiochien.”

9. It was apparently typical in the second century for Christian apologists such as Theophilus to enjoy friendly interreligious dialogue with pagans and non-Christian Jews. For example, Justin and Trypho likewise enjoyed friendly intercourse even as they strongly disagreed with each other on multiple issues. See Justin, *Dialogue* 8–9.

10. His two uses of the name refer to Joshua the son of Nun, whose name in Greek (Ἰησοῦς) is identical to Jesus’.

11. While Theophilus knew no formal New Testament canon, he knew most of the books that later compose such canons, and he regarded them to have authority very close or identical to that of the Old Testament. However, it is cumbersome to constantly use phrases like “books which later compose the New Testament.” Therefore, “New Testament writings,” “New Testament books,” “Bible,” “biblical,” and the like are freely used in the present study, even though explicit references to a New Testament canon only begin to occur during Theophilus’s lifetime, and even though unequivocal evidence for use of the term *διαθήκη*, “testament,” as a book title only first appeared in Christian writings with Clement of Alexandria (Kinzig, “Καينὴ διαθήκη” 519–44, shows that *διαθήκη* occurred as early as Justin as a theological concept, but only later as a book title). It is likewise cumbersome to constantly use phrases like “νόμος texts, by which Theophilus means writings which are later called the Old Testament.” Therefore, phrases like “Old Testament” or “Hebrew Scriptures” are sometimes used in the present study, even though Theophilus often simply referred to these as the words of the prophets, or referred to Old Testament texts, even some outside the Pentateuch, as God’s

Not only misunderstanding the force and content of his argument, modern readers sometimes denigrate the biblical exegesis of Theophilus and other early apologists. For example Dulles asserts, “When they insist on the perfect accord among the Biblical authors, they gloss over important differences between mutually opposed traditions.”<sup>12</sup> He suggests that the reason for these excessive glosses is that “they wrote before the dawn of critical history.”<sup>13</sup> However, his discussion does not fully consider ancient rhetorical and theological reasons motivating them to emphasize biblical unity. But by exploring ancient rhetorical and biblical motives for Theophilus’s exegetical moves, we can gain a more nuanced appreciation of them, indeed a more historical view of them, and thus be less inclined to fall into anachronism.

We will see in what follows that Theophilus knew some prominent Jewish exegetical traditions. But did he study the Hebrew Scriptures in their original languages? This is not likely. We find several reasons to suspect that he did not know Hebrew. For one thing, so many of his quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures use either the identical or only slightly modified Greek wordings of ancient Septuagint translations, this indicating that he relied upon them. For another thing, in places we find ignorance on his part about Hebrew grammatical nuances which are obscured in Greek translations. For example, Hebrew texts of Gen 4:10 present the Hebrew word for “blood” in the construct plural Hebrew grammatical form. Ruzer shows that exegetes of the patristic period who knew Hebrew noticed this form of the word and commented upon its theological significance, but Greek-speaking exegetes ignorant of Hebrew did not.<sup>14</sup> Neither did Theophilus. He only dealt with Gen 4:10 when he discussed the blood of Abel in his account of humanity’s early generations.<sup>15</sup> While he made much of the loca-

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νόμος (for example, *Autol.* 1.11; 2.8; 2.33). While such phrases as “Old Testament” and “New Testament” are therefore used, these will refer to the texts considered inspired by Theophilus himself. Thus, these terms will not necessarily be restricted to texts contained in present-day canons. Most typically, the phrase “inspired texts” is used to refer to certain Old Testament and New Testament books, plus some others, simply because Theophilus stated throughout *Ad Autolyicum* that such writings are produced by writers who were inspired by the Spirit of God. Sometimes the term “Scripture” is used, because Theophilus used the Greek equivalent of this term to refer to various Old Testament books.

12. Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 30.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Ruzer, “*Cave of Treasures*,” 263–64.

15. *Autol.* 2.29. Theophilus seems to have followed an exegetical tradition in his discussion of Abel’s blood. He asserted that the land rejects the blood of murder victims starting after the murder of Abel. This is striking since a rejection of blood by the land is not explicitly mentioned in Genesis 4. However, a rejection of dead flesh by the land does appear in the Greek text of the *Life of Adam and Eve* 40.4–5, where the

tion from which Abel's blood cried to the Lord, Theophilus did not notice or comment upon the construct plural form of the word denoting Abel's blood, apparently because the Septuagint uses a singular word to denote Abel's blood. One might think that Theophilus knew Hebrew because he did discuss the etymology of some Hebrew words, asserting for example that the Hebrew word for "Eden" means "luxury" (τρυφή).<sup>16</sup> But beyond these few Hebrew etymologies, there are simply no other suggestions in *Ad Autolyicum* that Theophilus knew Hebrew, and his few Hebrew etymologies were all traditional and already known among Greek-speaking Jews.<sup>17</sup> And so it is no surprise that his Hebrew etymology connected to the word "Eden" was already expressed by Philo.<sup>18</sup>

Scholarly dialog about Theophilus's use of Scripture has been advancing for some time. In 1859, Karl Otto recognized the importance of biblical allusions, not just quotations, for properly understanding Theophilus's use of NT texts.<sup>19</sup> His survey of the allusions is helpful partly because it references four quite plausible allusions not listed even in Marcovich's superb index of biblical quotations and allusions in *Ad Autolyicum*. These four biblical allusions are considered in chapter 5, since they are included in the database used by my ACTS software that was used to comprehensively identify possible use of testimony sources.<sup>20</sup>

Adolf von Harnack argued in 1890 that Theophilus had no New Testament canon, and that although he knew some New Testament epistles, he

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land declares after the murder of Abel that it will not receive any dead body until the death and burial of Adam. The writer mentioned this rejection by the land in order to explain why Cain was not able to hide the body of Abel in a grave. And an exact parallel is provided by Pseudo-Philo (*Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 16.2). The writer explained that, after God drove out the murderous Cain, God commanded the land to no longer swallow blood, saying, "No more would you swallow blood" (*Non adicias ut deglutias sanguinem*). The treatise was likely composed in Palestine sometime between 135 BCE and CE 100. See Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo," in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:298–300.

16. *Autol.* 2.24.

17. Bardy, *Théophile d'Antioche*, 10. As for Theophilus's etymology in *Autol.* 2.29 of the name "Eve," this could have been constructed using knowledge of Semitic words, as Zeegers argues. However, it is also not impossible that this etymology is based instead on Greek words, as Zeegers herself acknowledges. See Zeegers, "Satan, Eve et le serpent," 152–69.

18. Philo of Alexandria, *Legum allegoria* 1.45–46.

19. Otto, "Gebrauch neutestamentlicher Schriften bei Theophilus," 617–22.

20. These four allusions are Matt 5:8 in *Autol.* 1.2; Matt 7:12 in *Autol.* 2.34; Eph 4:18 in *Autol.* 1.7 and 2.35; and Titus 2:12 in *Autol.* 3.9. See chapter 5 regarding ACTS software and an innovative computational method for identifying ancient testimony sources.

did not regard them to be Scripture.<sup>21</sup> In Harnack's view, Theophilus nonetheless understood these books to be inspired by the Spirit, and specifically, paraphrases of God's Word.

Robert M. Grant in 1947 provided a helpful discussion of the biblical text-types of Theophilus, and also which books Theophilus considered to be Scripture.<sup>22</sup> He remarked that scholars have been unable to identify Theophilus's Septuagint text with any one text-type.<sup>23</sup> Grant's inability to identify Theophilus' biblical text-type is entirely understandable, since we now know that during the second century, the LXX was still in great flux, and there were a multitude of now-lost versions of it.<sup>24</sup> He also presented a point-by-point refutation of Harnack's argument that Theophilus did not consider New Testament epistles to be Scripture. He argued that Theophilus considered twelve and possibly fifteen of the New Testament books to be inspired, but not quite as authoritative as the Hebrew Scriptures. He also presented a detailed analysis of Theophilus's biblical chronology.<sup>25</sup> Grant provided helpful insights into Theophilus's use of biblical texts in his 1957 essay, "Scripture, Rhetoric and Theology in Theophilus."<sup>26</sup> He argued that although Theophilus placed a good deal of explicit biblical quotation with accompanying exegesis in his second letter, he elsewhere used Scripture quite differently, alluding rather than quoting explicitly. Grant explained that these frequent allusions to biblical texts functioned rhetorically for the bishop and allowed him to construct theological arguments. While Grant did not provide the detailed rhetorical analysis of *Ad Autolyicum* that I provide in chapter 4, he did open the gate leading toward that productive avenue.

Grant's 1947 response to Harnack demands further attention here, because it establishes how Theophilus viewed what was later called the Old and New Testaments. Harnack's and Grant's viewpoints revolve around terminology that Theophilus used as he defended Christians from ominous charges of treason against Rome. And indeed, the need for his defense was quite urgent. As a provincial capital, Antioch hosted a temple to Rome and to the emperor where regular religious sacrifices were offered to him.<sup>27</sup> It

21. Harnack, "Theophilus von Antiochien und das Neue Testament."

22. Grant, "Bible of Theophilus," 173–96.

23. Ibid., 177. For a recent exploration of the text-type of Theophilus's Genesis 1–3 text, see Prostmeier, "Genesis 1–3 in Theophilus von Antiochia," 359–94.

24. See Law, *When God Spoke Greek*, 75–79.

25. Grant, "Bible of Theophilus," 183–84, discusses which books Theophilus considered inspired. The chronology is discussed on 189–95.

26. Grant, "Scripture, Rhetoric and Theology in Theophilus," 33–45.

27. Concerning temples to Rome and to the emperor in provincial cities, see

would have been strikingly obvious to city residents that their Antiochene Christian neighbors refused to bow the knee to the emperor. The civic loyalty of Theophilus and his flock would have been continually under suspicion. They could not simply capitulate to emperor worship, since doing so would sabotage their claim of worshipping the only true God. Nonetheless, Theophilus could not side-step responding to the charge that Christians are politically subversive on account of refusing to worship the emperor. His solution to this quandary was to compose a rich series of allusions, recollections, and short quotations mostly from Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, plus one citation of an Old Testament text, Prov 24:21–22, all of which reinforced his point that Christians are good citizens, since they are commanded to obey, honor, and pray for kings and other governing authorities.<sup>28</sup> Regarding these uses of Christian inspired texts<sup>29</sup>, Harnack claims that although Theophilus knew various NT epistles, he did not regard them to be Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Harnack does not deny that Theophilus considered such epistles inspired, but objected to the claim that Theophilus referred to them as Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

But the crucial point is not really whether Theophilus *referred* to the epistles as Scripture, but whether he indeed *considered* them such, notwithstanding his terminology. He implied in the opening line of *Autol.* 3.12 that the prophets and the gospels exist on the same level in regard to both inspiration and authority. He claimed that the prophets and the gospels are consistent precisely because every inspired one (πνευματοφόρος) spoke by the one and same Spirit of God. And he was not the first to understand OT writings and the gospels to be entirely consistent, for it is obvious to all

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Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 211–12.

28. Book two of Josephus's *Contra Apionem* provided essentially the same answer that Theophilus did. While the Jews do not worship the emperors, they pray for them. Jews as well as Christians had to answer this charge of subversion.

29. Since ancient writers typically alluded to Scripture and other texts more often than they explicitly cited them, we necessarily rely on verbal parallels when identifying uses of Scripture in ancient texts. So as to draw from some degree of scholarly consensus regarding use of Scripture in *Ad Autolyicum*, uses discussed in this study unless otherwise noted are those appearing in both Marcovich's and *Biblia patristica's* biblical indexes. This approach is analogous to Bingham's method for reliably identifying distinctly Matthean uses of gospel texts by Irenaeus. See the discussion on verbal parallels in chapter 3 as well as Allenbach, *Des origines*; Bingham, *Irenaeus's Use of Matthew's Gospel*; Marcovich, *Theophili Antiocheni*. I do not attempt to confirm or critique Grant's discussion of what OT and NT books Theophilus knew, for which, see his "Bible of Theophilus."

30. Harnack, "Theophilus von Antiochien und das Neue Testament," 17–18.

31. Indeed, perhaps a few years after Theophilus corresponded with Autolyicus; Irenaeus was the earliest Christian writer to clearly denote the four Gospels to be "Scripture" (Bingham, *Irenaeus's Use of Matthew's Gospel*, 5–6).

students of *1 Clement* that the author sees a seamless continuity between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Theophilus's stated theory of inspiration that one Spirit of God inspired both prophets and inspired Christian writers, with the result that all of the inspired texts are consistent with one another, was indeed a traditional early Christian theology of inspiration.<sup>33</sup>

Harnack himself traces outlines of a theology of inspiration in *Ad Autolycum*, arguing on the basis of *Autol.* 2.9, 22; 3.12–14 that Theophilus considered not only the NT writings, but also other works such as the christianized *Sibylline Oracles*, to have the same level of authority as the Old Testament.<sup>34</sup> Harnack demonstrates varying estimations of the Sibyl in second-century Christianity, and then uses this variety to argue against Zahn's contention that a stable NT canon had developed by CE 160. Harnack is appalled by Zahn's thesis, because he sees the use of inspired writings in the second century to have been profoundly buffeted by historical forces. Accordingly, Harnack maintains that there was greater diversity of opinion among second-century Christians concerning which works were inspired than Zahn admits.<sup>35</sup>

But even if Harnack admits that Theophilus considered NT writings to be inspired, he nonetheless insists that Theophilus did not consider them to be Scripture. Harnack bolstered this view by claiming that Theophilus's defense against treason did not depend essentially on such passages as Rom 13:1, but only on Prov 24:21–22. Texts from NT epistles such as Rom 13:1 only supported the argument by re-expressing through paraphrase the content of Prov 24:21–22.

However, Grant adequately answers Harnack here by showing that (1) Theophilus indeed called texts quoted from certain NT epistles the “the divine word” (ὁ θεῖος λόγος) in *Autol.* 3.14; (2) since he considered the prophets to include the gospel writers in *Autol.* 2.34, he might well have included Paul; (3) at roughly the same time as Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria numbered the apostles among the prophets; (4) the phrase introducing the use of the NT epistolary texts in *Autol.* 3.14, “and moreover” (ἔτι μὲν καί), put those texts for Theophilus at essentially the same level of authority as

32. For this consistency in *1 Clement* (not Clement of Alexandria), see Skarsaune, “Development of Scriptural Interpretation,” 381–82.

33. *Autol.* 3.12. Similarly see Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses* 2.28.3; and Pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad gentiles* 16.

34. Harnack, *Neue Testament um das Jahr 200*, 39–40.

35. See especially the thesis statement in Harnack, *Neue Testament um das Jahr 200*, 4–7. Throughout the monograph, Harnack criticizes Zahn for undervaluing variations in second-century attitudes concerning canon.

OT texts and the gospels.<sup>36</sup> Thus, while Theophilus never called certain NT epistles “Scripture” (γραφή) in a technical sense, he essentially treated them as such on a functional level. Since he regarded them as inspired, this should not be surprising.

Massaux showed in his masterful 1950 dissertation on the use of Matthew up to the time of Irenaeus that Theophilus knew Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, and a number of Paul’s letters. Massaux analyzes all of the distinctly Matthean texts and notes that Theophilus often reproduced nearly the exact text of Matthew in his quotations although sometimes with minor wording variations, this indicating a literary dependence on Matthew. Massaux sees in *Ad Autolyicum* a predominant dependence on Matthew over the other canonical gospels.<sup>37</sup>

Simonetti presented a helpful analytical overview of Theophilus and the inspired texts in his 1972 “La sacra scrittura in Teofilo d’Antiochia.” Contra Harnack, and agreeing with Grant, Simonetti held that Theophilus used the phrase “divine word” (θεῖος λόγος) in reference to New Testament texts themselves. He also observed that Theophilus’s exegesis of Genesis highlights a principle of patristic exegesis in general: difficulties encountered in controversial passages are decided according to theological distinctives of various communities.<sup>38</sup> A major strength is Simonetti’s judicious description and assessment of the use of the inspired texts in *Ad Autolyicum*. One of the few weaknesses of this piece is that, being an older study, it relied on overly-simplified exegetical categories such as “letterale” (“literal”) and “allegorica” (“allegorical”). Another weakness is simply that limitation imposed by the short length of his essay, so that although he produced a well-balanced and very helpful overview, a detailed treatment of the use of the inspired texts in *Ad Autolyicum* is lacking.

Zeegers-Vander Vorst’s 1975 essay, “Les citations du Nouveau Testament dans les Livres Autolyucus de Théophile d’Antioche” is an important survey of Theophilus’s general use and understanding of the NT.<sup>39</sup> While she did not deal with his use of the NT in connection with Greco-Roman rhetorical standards, she did supply a particularly helpful overview of Theophi-

36. Grant, “Bible of Theophilus,” 183–84. Grant here cites Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.6.38. Grant does not think that Theophilus viewed the Pauline texts exactly as he viewed OT texts, since he asserted on pp. 188–89 that they were inspired and were probably “on the way to becoming scripture.”

37. Massaux, *Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew*.

38. Simonetti, “La sacra scrittura in Teofilo,” 197–207.

39. Zeegers, “Citations du Nouveau Testament,” 371–82. Her *Citations des poètes grecs* has become the standard reference for those interested in how well Theophilus and other Christian apologists knew the Greek poets they so often cited.