

Theophilus of Antioch: Jewish Christian?

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Among the patristic writings to which Miroslav Marcovich has devoted his attention are the Greek apologists of the second century. It is fitting, then, that a paper on Theophilus of Antioch and his background be dedicated to the brilliant and tireless scholar whom we honor in this volume of *Illinois Classical Studies*. The focus of this study is provided by the claim made by Robert M. Grant, my own mentor and a scholarly acquaintance of Miroslav Marcovich, that Theophilus of Antioch was a Jewish Christian. Grant and others have richly demonstrated the Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Jewish elements in the apology of Theophilus' *Ad Autolyicum*. A further suggestion, however, grows out of Grant's long attention to the cultural and theological world of Theophilus, namely that Theophilus also displays an affinity with more traditional Jewish modes of thought mediated through a distinctive Jewish Christianity.

It would be interesting and for many welcome that one of the early Greek church fathers should emerge from a tradition of a more characteristically Semitic type. In my view, however, the evidence for this is not strong, and it seems to me more likely that we have to do with an encounter between Theophilus and a more highly Hellenized Judaism at the intellectual level. To put it briefly, I shall try to show that in his debate with the pagan world Theophilus fell back on strategies and arguments that had already been developed before his day by Jews like Josephus and Philo who used the methods of Hellenistic philology and historiography to argue for the superiority of the Hebraic tradition.

Grant's arguments are, I believe, essentially three: first, that Theophilus' interpretation of Genesis depends on traditional Jewish exegesis; second, that Theophilus' Christology is distinctively Jewish Christian; and third, that Jewish Christianity of this type had a long history in Antioch. I shall take up these three arguments in order.

I. The Exegesis of Theophilus on Genesis

Theophilus comments on the opening chapters of the book of Genesis in the second book of his *Ad Autolyicum* (= *Aut.*) in order to demonstrate the superiority of the Biblical account of the cosmos and primordial times over

the inconsistent views of the Greek tradition. His analysis covers material from the first twenty-six chapters of Genesis (*Aut.* 2. 11–32) but is concentrated primarily on Genesis 1. 1–3. 19 (*Aut.* 2. 11–28). Grant's investigation of this material goes back to his dissertation, in which he attempted to show that Theophilus' exegesis could be compared fruitfully with exegesis found in *Bereshith Rabba*¹ and in Philo's *Questions on Genesis*.² In this early work Grant emphasized the parallels with *Bereshith Rabba*. Some nineteen items were studied, and Rabbinic parallels were offered for thirteen of them, parallels from Philo three times (only one unsupported by other sources), parallels from Scripture four times, and a parallel from Nemesius once (considered as throwing light on "Hebrew" ideas).³ In a more recent survey of roughly the same material (eighteen items), however, the emphasis has changed. Grant now offers parallels from Philo for eleven of the items (most of them unsupported by other sources), parallels from the Rabbis for six of the items (five of them unsupported by other sources), and the same parallel from Nemesius.⁴ Yet Grant still refers to *Bereshith Rabba* (= *BR*) and Philo's *Questions on Genesis* (= *QG*) as the major sources for parallels and still claims that the evidence shows that "Theophilus' exegesis of the Old Testament is primarily Jewish and even rabbinic."⁵ It is the final expression, "and even rabbinic," that strikes me as especially problematic. It should also be noted that in this context Grant explicitly draws attention to his earlier work (and that of others on which it builds) in spite of the changed emphasis in the more recent investigation.

It is first necessary, then, to survey the parallels from Rabbinic sources provided by Grant to see what can be made of them. I shall list the relevant themes in Theophilus, quote or summarize the relevant parallels, and comment briefly. The items that appear in the more recent study as well as in the earlier study will be marked with an asterisk (*). Clearly these six must be regarded as having special importance for the argument.

(1) Two heavens ("this firmament" and "another heaven which is invisible to us") are mentioned in Genesis (*Aut.* 2. 13). Grant recognizes

¹ English translation: H. Freedman and M. Simon, *Midrash Rabbah I: Genesis* (London 1939). Hebrew text: J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshith Rabba* (Jerusalem 1965).

² English translation: R. Marcus, *Philo*, Supplement I: *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (Cambridge, MA 1953). French translation: C. Mercier, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim I et II e versione armeniaca*, Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie XXXIVA, ed. by R. Amaldez, J. Pouilloux, and C. Mondésert (Paris 1979); C. Mercier, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim III-IV-V-VI, Complément de l'ancienne version latine*, par F. Petit, Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie XXXIVB (Paris 1984); F. Petit, *Quaestiones in Genesim et in Exodum fragmenta graeca*, Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie XXXIII (Paris 1978).

³ R. M. Grant, "Theophilus of Antioch To Autolycus," *Harvard Theological Review* 40 (1947) 227–56 (see 237–41 for the parallels).

⁴ R. M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia 1988) 157–59.

⁵ Grant (previous note) 157.

that the best parallels are in Philo (*De opif. mund.* 29, the first heaven is incorporeal; 36, the "firmament" of Genesis is our visible heaven).⁶ Theophilus' treatment of the theme is less complex since it does not explicitly involve the contrast between the intelligible world and the sensible world as in Philo. Grant's undocumented mention of comparable Tannaitic commentary on Deuteronomy 10. 14 may be a reference to *B. Hag.* 12b (R. Juda declares that there are "two firmaments").⁷ The Talmudic statement is part of a list of opinions in answer to the question concerning the number of heavens that exist. The Philonic parallel is more closely connected with Genesis and seems more to the point.

* (2) Creation began from above, a remark directed against Hesiod, who described creation "by starting from beneath" in the way that human beings build (*Aut.* 2. 13). The point in *BR* 1. 13 (referred to by Grant in his earlier study) is that whereas the success of human building is uncertain, that of God is not. Grant recognized that the similarity here depended merely on the fact that the text speaks of how a failed human effort at erecting a building can be corrected only by widening the building below and narrowing it at the top. In his later study Grant dropped this reference and concentrated instead on *BR* 1. 15, which has to do with the view that heaven was created before earth: "This is parallel to the case of a king who first made his throne and then his footstool" (quoting Isaiah 66. 1).⁸ This passage, however, has nothing to do with proclaiming the superiority of the divine builder. It also is more closely connected with the related theme that we take up next and that finds a better parallel in Philo. It seems likely that Theophilus says what he does here simply because he notes an obvious difference between Genesis and Hesiod.

(3) Heaven came first (*Aut.* 2. 13). In spite of the apparent clarity of the Biblical text there was disagreement among the Rabbis as to whether heaven or earth came first. The followers of Shammai were the ones who insisted on the priority of heaven (*BR* 1. 15). Theophilus does not argue the point in the manner of the Rabbis but simply takes the priority of heaven for granted as most readers of Genesis are likely to do. The priority of heaven is also taken for granted by Philo (*De opif. mund.*). In one passage Philo explains how the sentence, "in the beginning God created heaven and earth," means simply, "he made the heaven first," in order to avoid any implication that God was subject to time (26). In another passage he states that the visible heaven (the firmament) was "the first of the parts" of the

⁶ Commentary on the first creation story in Genesis is missing from *QG*. The *De opificio mundi* must serve as something of a substitute for the missing material.

⁷ I owe the reference to Professor Gary Porton, who has generously assisted me in the investigation of a number of the parallels studied here. (It is uncertain, of course, whether this particular R. Juda is the Tannaitic master, R. Juda ben Il'ai.)

⁸ Compare Origen (*Hom. in Gen.* 1. 2): "For he made heaven first, about which he says, 'heaven is my throne'."

cosmos since it was the best of all its parts (36). Note that imagery from the sphere of building is not foreign to Philo's description of creation either (17–18). Special reference to Rabbinic sources is not required to explain what we find in Theophilus.

* (4) Half of the waters separated by the firmament was raised up and the other half left on earth (*Aut.* 2. 13). More than one Rabbi also declared that God took the primordial waters and “poured half in the firmament and half into the ocean” (*BR* 4. 4; cf. 4. 5). Especially since Philo has nothing like that, the parallel needs to be taken seriously. The possibility remains, however, that Theophilus reached his view of the matter independently. Note first of all that many of the church fathers recognized that the text of Genesis described a literal division of water. (Augustine reflects the exegetical tradition in *De Gen. ad litt.* 2. 9.) A distinctively Jewish milieu was not required to reach that conclusion. Second, the Septuagint of Genesis 1. 6–8 speaks of the firmament as dividing “between” (ἀνά μέσσω) the water above and the water below. The expression “between” is indefinite and moreover is used two verses before to describe the division between light and darkness (1. 4). Yet the peculiar expression “dividing between water and water” in Genesis 6. 1 may have suggested to a reader like Theophilus that the division was equal. For “midway between” is one of the possible meanings of the expression ἀνά μέσσω in ancient technical Greek.⁹ It should also be noted that Theophilus is thinking of the division in more “scientific” terms: The half above has to do with rains and showers and dews; the half below has to do with rivers and springs and seas. That is missing from the Rabbinic parallels.

(5) The collection of the waters was made by the Logos (*Aut.* 2. 13). Grant refers to *BR* 5. 4: “The *voice* of the Lord became a guide to the waters” (with a cross reference to Psalm 29. 3, which speaks of the “*voice* of the Lord over the waters,” as opposed to Psalm 13. 4, which speaks of the “*voices* of many waters”). In the background, however, in Theophilus is the apologist's previous statement concerning the first day of creation, that “the Command (διάταξις) of God, his Logos,” made light “apart from the cosmos.” Thus wherever God “commands” (cf. Philo, *De opif. mund.* 38 προστάττει ὁ θεὸς τὸ ὕδωρ), his Logos is at work within the framework of Theophilus' theology. A special discussion about the voice of God prompted by competing verses in the Psalms does not seem particularly relevant.

(6) The creation of plants and seeds before that of the luminaries refutes the naturalistic philosophers (*Aut.* 2. 15). Grant admits that the theme is

⁹ LSJ, s.v. μέσσω III.1.e (Aristotle, *Hist. anim.* 496a22; the discussion is about the three cavities of the heart; one is “midway between” the other two; admittedly it is also intermediate in size, with the one on the right being larger and the one on the left being smaller).

“not quite paralleled” in *BR* 6. 1. On the other hand, as he later recognized, it is almost exactly paralleled in Philo (*De opif. mund.* 45–46).¹⁰

(7) The wild animals will ultimately be restored to gentleness (*Aut.* 2. 17). Grant refers in this connection to Isaiah 65. 25 (see also 11. 6–8). The theme is also known to us from an early fragment of the Jewish Christian Papias, and in commenting on him Irenaeus saw the relevance of the Isaianic passages (*Adv. haer.* 5. 33. 3–4). It seems likely that these striking texts would stand out for anyone familiar with Scripture. Irenaeus notes that some before his time thought that they referred to savage people and not to animals. The passages obviously invited considerable discussion.

(8) Man was “the only work worthy of his [God’s] hands” (*Aut.* 2. 18). In the *Abot de-R. Nathan* (1. 18) an explanation is given as to how we know “that Adam was made by the two hands of God.”¹¹ The Rabbinic text also seems to stress the high dignity of the human creature. But it should be noted that here the temple as well as man are said to have been created “with both of God’s hands.” It should also be noted that the Rabbinic text is preoccupied with deciding whether one or two hands of God were involved. This preoccupation is absent from Theophilus. The latter simply takes it for granted that “his own hands” refers to God’s Logos and his Sophia. It is perhaps striking that there is a preoccupation with God’s hands in the first place since they are not mentioned in Genesis. Yet it would seem obvious to any reader of Genesis that God used his hands in creating man: “And God formed man of dust from the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2. 7). Precisely such a reading of the text is attested before the time of Theophilus by Clement of Rome, who says that God “formed man, his pre-eminent and greatest work, with his holy and blameless *hands* . . .” (1 Clement 33. 4). Note that Clement also shares with Theophilus the emphasis on the high dignity of man in this connection (and that accordingly both quote Gen. 1. 26). Such a coordination of themes from Genesis seems more or less inevitable after the text had become an object of theological reflection.

* (9) The “two trees of life and knowledge are found in no other land than in paradise alone” (*Aut.* 2. 24), and “the tree of knowledge . . . did not contain death” (*Aut.* 2. 25). Grant comments that the “tree of knowledge puzzled the rabbis” and refers to *BR* 15. 7, where the Rabbis offer several suggestions concerning the type of plant or tree that was involved. One notable view was that God “did not and will not reveal to man what that tree was,” so that humans should not hate it afterwards for having caused death.

¹⁰ R. M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch Ad Autolyicum* (Oxford 1970) 51.

¹¹ For translation and commentary see J. Neusner, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan: An Analytic Translation and Explanation*, Brown Judaic Studies 114 (Atlanta 1986) 16. Professor Gary Porton has pointed out to me that the discussion in *Abot* is connected with that in *BR* 8. 1 through the quotation of Psalm 139. 5 (which figures complexly in the discussion as to whether one or two hands of God were involved).

This very comment, however, reflects the fact that most of the suggestions of the Rabbis had to do with an identification of the forbidden fruit in terms of some known natural species.¹² Theophilus, on the other hand, has something different in mind when he says that “the other plants [in paradise] were like those the world has, but the two trees of life and knowledge *no other land has* and they are found in paradise alone.” That possibly represents a marginal Rabbinic view, but it is more likely to represent a reading of the text of Genesis by Theophilus himself or some Christian predecessor (especially since the apologist makes a blanket statement covering both of the mysterious trees in paradise). That the apologist is facing a new set of problems is suggested also by what appears to be the anti-Marcionite rejection of the description of the tree of knowledge as a tree that brought death.¹³

(10) According to Grant, “Theophilus treats the rivers of paradise as real. Since this view is rejected by Philo (*QG* 1. 12–13) it was accepted by other Jews.”¹⁴ But many readers took the reality of the garden for granted, and Theophilus’ special emphasis on that point (*Aut.* 2. 24, “that paradise is a parcel of earth and was planted on the earth,” “that paradise is under this very heaven”) is probably prompted by a concern to resist pagan criticism of the story or a Gnostic allegorizing of it. In any event, a retreat to traditional Jewish exegesis need not be the only possible explanation for the emphasis.

*(11) Adam’s “work” (Gen. 2. 15) is “to keep the commandment of God” (*Aut.* 2. 24). Grant in his more recent study finds a parallel in *QG* 1. 14. But the line quoted is not clear, and the passage as a whole focuses on other issues. More to the point (though complicated) is Philo’s allegorization of Adam’s “work” in other passages, where the talk is of tilling and guarding the virtues (*Leg. alleg.* 1. 53–54; 1. 88–89). Grant also refers to *BR* 16. 5, where Adam’s work is linked especially to the keeping of the Sabbath. Clearly there was a widespread tendency to redirect the meaning of the text, and it is probably unwise to make too much of any one of the parallels. This is particularly true since “Theophilus may be answering the criticisms of the Marcionites: by requiring Adam to work God was showing his own weakness.”¹⁵ In this connection, however, note that Philo had already discussed the question as to why God commanded man to work and guard the garden “when paradise was not in need of work, for it was complete in all things as having been planted by God . . .” (*QG* 1. 14). Philo does not at this point provide an answer in allegorical terms (he is uncharacteristically satisfied to defend it at the literal level). But the

¹² L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia 1909–38) V 97–98.

¹³ Grant (above, note 10) 67 (the Marcionite Apelles raised just such objections).

¹⁴ Grant (above, note 4) 158.

¹⁵ Grant (above, note 10) 67.

passage suggests the climate that would call forth non-literal readings of the text.

(12) "In his actual age, Adam was as old as an infant" (*Aut.* 2. 25). This is not the teaching of the Rabbis. Grant refers to *BR* 22. 2 but can extract what he wants from it only by reading it in the light of patristic parallels. The standard Rabbinic view was that Adam was formed a completely developed human being (*BR* 14. 7). Ginzberg summarizes the evidence as follows: "Like all creatures formed on the six days of creation, Adam came from the hands of the Creator fully and completely developed. He was not like a child, but like a man of twenty years of age."¹⁶

*(13) God showed his beneficence in allowing Adam's future return to paradise (*Aut.* 2. 26). Grant appeals to a discussion in *BR* 21. 7 about whether Adam was or was not sent out of the paradise both in this world and the next. Clearly some Rabbis adopted a view analogous to that of Theophilus. The context of the theme, however, is rather different. The Rabbinic parallel is connected with Genesis 3. 27. Theophilus, on the other hand, is trying to explain why Adam is said to have been placed into the garden twice, first in Gen. 2. 8 and again in Gen. 2. 15. His answer is that the first passage concerns the past and the second passage the future. We shall also see presently that such efforts to explain away an apparent difficulty in the text are intelligible against the background of Hellenistic philological procedures in dealing with the classics. Under these circumstances a distinctive application of the widespread theme of the return to "paradise" (cf. Luke 23. 43; 2 Cor. 12. 4) does not seem to require Rabbinic prototypes. Moreover, the union of an historical and an eschatological reading of the creation story was natural in a tradition that as early as 1 Corinthians 15. 45-49 had contrasted the first Adam with "the second Man from heaven."

(14) Adam had free will (*Aut.* 2. 27). Grant provides a parallel from *BR* 14. 3 ("The Lord reasoned: If I created him of the celestial elements he will live [forever] and not die; while if I created him of the terrestrial elements he will die and not live [in the future life]"). But an appeal to free will in pre-Augustinian Christianity (especially in opposition to Stoic fatalism or Gnostic predestinarianism) is scarcely remarkable.

In any event, the Rabbinic parallel may have more to do with the statement of Theophilus that "if God had made him immortal from the beginning, he would have made him God; again, if he had made him mortal, it would seem that God was responsible for his death; therefore God made him neither immortal nor mortal, but, as we have said before, capable of both" (*Aut.* 2. 27). Here Grant appeals to the fourth-century patristic writer Nemesius, who reports as follows: "The Hebrews say that from the beginning man came into being neither mortal indeed nor immortal but on

¹⁶ Ginzberg (above, note 12) I 59.

the borderline of each of the two natures."¹⁷ Morani, the recent editor of Nemesius, draws attention to Philo, who also identifies man as a "borderline" creature that shares an immortal and a mortal nature (*De opif. mund.* 134–35). Grant rejects the parallel, for he evidently thinks that Theophilus and the "Hebrews" of Nemesius (unlike Philo) both avoid an interpretation of the twofold nature of man dominated by standard philosophical categories. Grant seems correct on this point, especially since Nemesius goes on to discuss a related interpretation that seems equally independent, "that man was created mortal but capable of becoming immortal when brought to perfection by moral progress." If I have caught the drift of Grant's argument, the Rabbinic parallel quoted at the beginning of the previous paragraph may not have been the happiest choice since it could be taken to represent in a less technical form the standard philosophical distinction between higher and lower elements in the nature of human beings. In any event, we must ask whether the "Hebrews" of Nemesius are Jewish thinkers of the Rabbinic type. Or is this simply Nemesius' way of referring to a traditional (Christian) reading of the Bible? A few pages later he remarks that it is "a dogma of the Hebrews that this whole world came into being for the sake of man."¹⁸ Rabbinic as well as Christian parallels could be provided for that view. But it also represents a natural reading of the Bible and would perhaps occur especially to anyone influenced by Stoic views of the centrality of man in the providential scheme of things.¹⁹ Must Nemesius be in touch with Judaism of a Rabbinic type to have reached such conclusions? Similarly, then, the idea that man though created mortal was capable of achieving immortality may in a general way be compatible with Rabbinic thought; but it is unlikely that many Rabbis would know what to make of the primary suggestion that Adam was created neither mortal nor immortal. When the Rabbis discuss the link between sin and the necessity of death, the pervasive assumption (especially in the early period) is that Adam was created mortal and that death is inevitable and natural.²⁰ The Rabbinic parallel quoted at the beginning of the previous paragraph certainly implies as much. Thus the way in which the question is set up by Theophilus and Nemesius reflects in itself a different theological world. At the same time, the fact that a person like Theophilus also retains basic "Hebraic" theological impulses in the teeth of the influence of philosophical anthropology is no more remarkable than the continued insistence in the cosmological thinking of the early

¹⁷ *De natura hominis* 1 (PG XL 513b; p. 6, ed. Morani).

¹⁸ P. 11, ed. Morani.

¹⁹ M. Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des pères de l'Église*, Patristica Sorbonensia 1 (Paris 1969) 380–84.

²⁰ See, for example, E. E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs* (repr. Cambridge, MA 1987) 264–66, 279, 420–36.

church that the world has a beginning and an end in the teeth of the influence of philosophical cosmology.

*(15) Adam and Eve were created together (i.e., Eve was created from Adam?) to demonstrate the oneness of God in the face of polytheism (*Aut.* 2. 28). Grant refers to the Mishna: “. . . also that the heretics should not say, ‘There are many ruling powers in heaven’” (*M. San.* 4. 5). The creation of Eve is not mentioned in the passage from the Mishna. Instead, the argument relies on the point that only a single individual was created, and the warning against polytheism is but one application of that point. Nevertheless, Theophilus and the Mishna are very close to one another in spirit at this point, especially since the creation of man alone from the earth is also said by Theophilus (in Nautin’s reconstruction of the text) to demonstrate the mystery of the divine unity. This must be considered a stronger piece of evidence than usual. At the same time, it may be considered likely that strategies of this kind were carried over into more highly Hellenized forms of commentary on Scripture. Note, for example, that Philo explains the use of the singular command to Adam in Genesis 2. 16 (“eat”) as opposed to the plural command in the next verse (“do not eat”) as pointing to the oneness of God, who harmonizes all the many things in the world (*QG* 1. 15). This is very close to saying that the oneness of Adam points to the oneness of God (though the polemical implications of the interpretation are much subtler in Philo). In this connection, it should also be recalled that Theophilus treats the first three days of creation prior to the luminaries as “types of the triad of God and his Logos and his Sophia” (*Aut.* 2. 15). Thus he seems attuned to the kind of numerological symbolism that plays such an important role in Philo’s commentary on Genesis, and his treatment of the single creation of Adam and Eve may well reflect the same mindset.

(16) Adam “prophesied” the separation of a man from his family to join with his wife (*Aut.* 2. 28; cf. Gen. 2. 23–24). Grant appeals especially to the arguments of Ginzberg on this point.²¹ The latter provides Rabbinic parallels for treating Adam as a prophet, but argues more especially that the picture of Adam as prophet was connected to the deep sleep (“ecstasy” in the Septuagint) that is said to have fallen on Adam in Genesis 2. 21 (which is reasonably closely connected to the “prophecy” a few verses later that Theophilus discusses). Here, however, the most relevant parallel again seems to be in Philo. The latter in fact has a long discussion of the use of the term “ecstasy” in the Greek Bible in which he distinguishes four types: madness, fear, Adam’s sleep in Gen. 2. 21, and the prophetic ecstasy of Abraham in Gen. 15. 12 (*Quis rer. div. her.* 249–66). Clearly Adam’s ecstasy does not qualify as prophecy from the point of view of this careful discussion. But it is not hard to imagine that other readers of the Greek Bible were less discriminating and would on some such basis have ascribed

²¹ Ginzberg (above, note 12) I 62, V 83 n. 30.

prophetic status to Adam. If there is something characteristically Rabbinic about ascribing prophetic status to Adam, it seems likely that it was carried across into interpretations of the Greek text of the Bible in a distinctive form.

This discussion of the exegetical work of Theophilus does not decisively rule out contact between the apologist and sources of a Rabbinic or proto-Rabbinic type. Some of the examples studied above still may be taken to point in that direction, and there may be others that could be found if the material were thoroughly reworked. At the same time, Jewish scholarship of a more highly Hellenized type seems to provide the more likely point of contact. I have not felt it necessary to deal in detail with the many other parallels provided by Grant from Philo precisely because they seem to be generally relevant and to support the argument that I have developed here.

The argument developed here may be further reinforced by attending to the larger context within which the points discussed above are found. In the first place, the link between Theophilus' comments on Genesis and the commentary of Philo on Genesis are comparable in that they both reflect the procedures of Hellenistic philologists in dealing with the classics of ancient Greek literature. As Ralph Marcus says in the introduction to his translation of Philo's *Questions on Genesis*: "In its form [it] resembles Hellenistic (pagan) commentaries on the Homeric poems."²² One notable feature of such work on the classics was the concern to explain (or explain away) what were regarded as linguistic, historical, moral, and theological incongruities in the text. Such difficulties had to do with things said of the gods "unworthy" of them, gross anthropomorphisms, cowardly acts by heroes, apparent contradictions in the narrative, and so forth. Example after example of the same concern can be culled from Philo's work. He too tries to explain why God is said to descend from heaven, why the patriarchs appear to do immoral deeds, why Moses has God shift from singular commands to plural commands without warning, and so forth. Similarly, as Kathleen McVey has argued, "Theophilus is concerned to safeguard the philosophical acceptability of the sacred text despite anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in the narrative." Thus he must explain what it means that God "walked" in the Garden, that God "spoke," that he presumably formed human beings with his hands, that he "planted" a garden, that he questioned Adam as though ignorant of his doings, that he appears to be jealous or angry in his punishment of Adam, that the tree of knowledge seems to bring death, and that the narrative seems to contain disjunctions and needless repetitions.²³

²² Marcus (above, note 2) ix.

²³ K. E. McVey, "The Use of Stoic Cosmogony in Theophilus of Antioch's *Hexaemeron*," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on*

This view of Theophilus' purpose can be substantiated by an instructive comment that he makes on the seventh day of creation in *Ad Autolyicum* 2. 19. The Greek expression ζήτημα ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀνεύρετον occurs here. The translations take it as referring to some "insoluble problem among men" (Dods, Grant) or "un problème insoluble pour les hommes" (Bardy-Sender).²⁴ In this passage, Theophilus glances back to the creation of humans on the sixth day and then leaps ahead from the seventh day to the description in Genesis 2. 6-7 of how God breathed the breath of life into the first human. Why suddenly leap ahead? The answer in Theophilus' own words is this: "so that there might not seem to be an insoluble problem among men since 'let us make man' has been spoken by God but man's formation had not yet been manifested" (Grant). It is hard to see the point of the remark when it is translated in that way. Why talk about a problem that could conceivably affect the human race when the concern is to show how one text of Genesis needs to be supplemented with another text?

A more cogent understanding of the passage depends on recognizing that the word ζήτημα can be used in ancient literary studies to refer to a "question" or "query" about some linguistic, historical, moral, or theological difficulty in the text. Thus it is one of the terms used to describe inquiries into Homeric problems (Porphyry, for example, uses it in the introduction to his study of Homeric problems²⁵), and it is also the term that lies behind the Armenian title of Philo's "Questions" on Genesis. For, as Ralph Marcus notes, one related fragment from Philo is said in the Greek source to come ἐκ τῶν ἐν Λευιτικῷ ζητημάτων.²⁶

What Theophilus is trying to do here, then, is to deal with what he regards as a perplexing feature of the text of Genesis, namely the fact that the creation of the first human is mentioned in Genesis 1. 26 without the special mode of human creation being clearly specified. Implied here is a concern to have stated what it is that sets human beings apart from animals. From his point of view, the situation is saved by the fact that this apparent omission is made good along with the description of the garden of Eden. That Theophilus ties things together in this way is shown when he takes a backward glance a few sections later and says, "God made man on the sixth day, but revealed his formation after the seventh day" (*Aut.* 2. 23). All is well, then, from his point of view, since the second passage from Genesis fills in the blank. It lets us know that God breathed into Adam the breath of

his Sixtieth Birthday, ed. by M. S. Burrows and P. Rorem (Grand Rapids, MI 1991) 32-58, esp. 54-55.

²⁴ M. Dods, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI 1956) 102; Grant (above, note 10) 57; G. Bardy and J. Sender, *Théophile d'Antioche, Trois livres à Autolycus*, Sources Chrétiennes 29 (Paris 1948) 147.

²⁵ A. R. Sodano, *Porphyrii quaestionum Homericarum liber I* (Naples 1970) 1 (lines 10-11). The term also appears in the traditional title of the work. Cf. W. Schmid and O. Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*⁶ II (Munich 1912) 81-86.

²⁶ Marcus (above, note 2) xi note a.

life and so bestowed on him the special characteristic of human beings—the immortality of the human soul.

The expression ζήτημα ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀνεύρετον, then, does not refer to some “insoluble problem among men” or “for men,” but rather to some (presumed) “insoluble query on the topic of human beings” in the text of Genesis that the author sets out to solve. The preposition ἐν here bears the generally recognized meaning, “in respect of.” Theophilus, in short, conceives of himself as exploring in the manner of a Hellenistic philologist the apparent difficulties in the text of Scripture and falls back on Hellenistic Jewish prototypes for assistance.

Before leaving this comparison between the methods of Theophilus and Philo (in *QG*), one other general similarity should be noted. Both Philo and Theophilus move in a systematic way from a literal reading of a text to an allegorical interpretation of it. Both move more or less systematically through the Biblical text but on occasion skip over some passages. There are exceptions to the rule that our two authors move from a literal reading to an allegorical interpretation, and the procedures in this connection are somewhat looser and less thoroughgoing in Theophilus than in Philo. It is also true, as we have seen, that Theophilus sometimes feels constrained to emphasize the literal meaning of a text. But that occurs in his account of the second story of creation. For the first creation story, on the other hand, clear moves from the literal to the allegorical level are to be found in Theophilus as he consciously provides another level of meaning for the sea (*Aut.* 2. 14), for the sun, the numbers three and four in connection with the first three and four days of creation, and the stars (*Aut.* 2. 15), for the sea monsters and carnivorous birds (*Aut.* 2. 16), and for the wild animals (*Aut.* 2. 17). The difference in approach may point to the use of different sources.

My impression is that such a systematic move from a literal reading to an allegorical meaning does not find its inspiration in interpretation of a Rabbinic type. In the material that we now have (like *BR*) there is much that a modern interpreter might consider fanciful and/or allegorical. But the sages themselves do not seem to have viewed their expositions as moving at clearly differentiated levels, and I know of no evidence that they ever moved more or less systematically from one level to another in the early period. Unfortunately, it is equally difficult to say whether such a method characterized the Hellenistic commentaries on the classics. It may have been found in the work of someone like Crates of Mallus. His less technical book on Homer seems to have included discussions about such things as Homer's knowledge of geography and astronomy, allegorical interpretation of the gods in the manner of the Stoics, and solutions to a variety of different kinds of difficulties in the text.²⁷ This or something like it sounds like a promising mix that may have inspired the Hellenistic Jewish

²⁷ W. Kroll, “Crates 16,” *RE* XI.2 (Stuttgart 1922) 1634–41.

predecessors of Theophilus. But our knowledge of this material is simply too fragmentary to put very much weight on it. In any event, the methods of Theophilus seem closer to those of Hellenistic scholarship in general and to Philo (or someone like Philo) in particular.

Other recent research suggests that even broader contexts of Hellenistic and Hellenistic Jewish scholarship lie behind Theophilus' interpretation of Genesis. Thus Arthur Droge argues that a major concern of Theophilus was to develop a theory of the emergence of technology and of civilization based on Genesis and that this theory was derived from the work of Hellenistic Jewish predecessors. The latter in turn, according to Droge, were responding to the efforts of Hellenistic monarchies in formerly barbarian territories to increase the prestige of their own regions by supporting scholars who argued for the barbarian origin of Greek technology and civilization.²⁸ Kathleen McVey, in the paper noted above, extends Droge's analysis. By emphasizing the link between cosmogony and cultural history more generally in Hellenistic historiography, she is able to show that most of what appears in Theophilus' apology was tied together in the work of his predecessors. In this connection, she argues particularly for the impact of Stoic cosmogony on Theophilus' reading of Genesis 1–3.²⁹ Further research may be able to make clearer the relation between these suggestions and the material presented above. In any event, this research also reads Theophilus against the background primarily of Hellenistic and Hellenistic Jewish scholarship.

II. The Christology of Theophilus

What we have said about Theophilus' exegetical method is not in itself sufficient to deny that he was a Christian with special affinities to some form of Jewish Christianity. But it narrows the evidence on which that judgment is based. We turn, then, to the apologist's Christology to see whether that may suggest such affinities.

Grant has repeatedly argued that Theophilus thinks of Jesus as a prophetic figure exalted by God for his obedience to the divine will.³⁰ At the heart of the argument is his demonstration that Theophilus modelled his description of Adam on Luke's description of the twelve-year-old Jesus, who made progress in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and humans (*Aut.* 2. 24–25). Here are the parallels more or less as presented by Grant.

²⁸ A. J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie* 26 (Tübingen 1989) 102–23.

²⁹ McVey (above, note 23).

³⁰ Grant (above, note 4) 171–73; *Jesus After the Gospels: The Christ of the Second Century* (Louisville, KY 1990) 77–79.

According to Theophilus, Adam was given "an opportunity for *progress* (Luke 2. 52) so that by *growing* (Luke 2. 52; 1. 80) and becoming *mature* (Eph. 4. 13) and furthermore having been declared a *god* (John 20. 28) he might also *ascend into heaven* (Luke 24. 51; Acts 1. 9–11) . . . possessing immortality." Adam was "in his actual age an *infant* (νήπιος)" or minor (Luke 1. 80). Thus he learned obedience since "this is a holy duty *not only before God but before men* (Luke 2. 52), to *obey one's parents* in simplicity and without malice (Luke 2. 43), and *if children must obey their parents* (Luke 2. 43, 51), how much more must they *obey the God and Father of the universe* (Luke 2. 49)." "For as one *grows* in age in an orderly fashion so one grows in ability to *think*" (cf. Luke 1. 80, 2. 40, 52). To these Grant adds a few tenuous parallels having to do with Theophilus' defense of resurrection.

The most important passages from Luke are these: "and the *child* (παιδίον) *grew* and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Luke 1. 80); "and Jesus *increased in wisdom and in stature*, and in favor *with God and man*" (Luke 2. 52). Thus, as Grant sees it, "Jesus seems to be a second Adam, or rather, Adam seems to be regarded as a first Christ," and "the work of both Adam and Christ" is seen "as exemplary, not efficacious."

The parallels are interesting but should not be pressed too hard. The occasional non-Lukan passages adduced probably detract from the evidence rather than add to it. The reference to Adam as a god is probably no more than a recognition of the statement of God in Genesis 3. 22 ("look, Adam has become as one of us"). References to ascending to heaven and doing one's duty before God and men may well reflect more widely diffused themes. A discussion of the obedience due parents may simply flow naturally from the image of Adam as a child. Grant, to be sure, thinks that the subject of the obedience of the child does not naturally come up for Theophilus at all and thus must go back to Luke. But it is particularly closely tied in with Theophilus' remarks that the tree of knowledge "did not contain death as some suppose" or that "God was not jealous as some suppose" (*Aut.* 2. 25). The image of the child is part and parcel of Theophilus' whole notion of the pedagogic function of the command to Adam in the garden. It helps rebut the suggestion that there is anything inappropriate about the story. We now know why God ordered Adam not to eat of knowledge: Adam was "in his actual age an infant" and infants need to learn how to acquire knowledge properly. It was not because God was jealous. By putting these themes back into their context in Theophilus we see that the apologist may well have invented the image of Adam as a child himself to explain the text.³¹

³¹ Grant argues ([above, note 4] 172) that Theophilus "also takes Paul's comparison of Adam with Christ and rewrites it so that it contrasts man then with man now" (*Aut.* 2. 27; Rom. 5. 15–21). The most striking reformulation occurs where Theophilus writes, "for as by

The problem is complicated by the fact that Irenaeus seems to have drawn from Theophilus³² where he develops a comparable picture of the human race that since the time of Adam grows and progresses to maturity and perfection (*Adv. haer.* 4. 37–39). According to Irenaeus, “we were not made *gods* at our beginning, but first we were made men, then, in the end, gods”; God did this out of goodness, *not from envy*; he gave us *free will*; our *initial weakness* was necessary (4. 37. 4); we were gradually *educated* by means of our rebellion (4. 37. 7); “being newly created they [human beings] are therefore *childish and immature*, and not yet fully trained for an adult way of life”; God “could have offered perfection to man at the beginning, but man, being yet an *infant* (νήπιος), could not have taken it”; “man *gradually advances* and mounts towards *perfection*”; “man has first to come into being, then to *progress*, and by progressing to come to *manhood*, and having reached manhood to *increase*, and thus increasing to persevere, and by persevering be *glorified*, and thus see his Lord” (4. 38. 1–3); what is good is “to *obey* God, to believe in him, and *keep his commandments*” (4. 39. 1). Loofs in a celebrated study attributed little originality to Irenaeus in this as in so much else that appears in his theology.³³ But the likelihood is that Irenaeus modified his source significantly.³⁴ Thus Theophilus does not give a broad evolutionary interpretation to his picture of Adam as a child, and Irenaeus seems not to have dealt with Adam literally as a child. Yet if anything can be made out about lost expositions of Theophilus from their use in Irenaeus, it would seem that reflection on Adam or the human race as a growing child did not rely on impulses primarily from the Gospel of Luke. It should also be noted that in Irenaeus such reflection is linked with a Christology that may sometimes look primitive from a later orthodox point of view but that is not Jewish Christian in Grant’s sense of the term.³⁵ In another connection, to be sure, Grant has shown that Irenaeus modified a number of theological themes that he derived from Theophilus.³⁶ These changes are not radical changes, however, and the fact that Irenaeus everywhere takes the teaching of the incarnation for granted suggests that

disobedience man gained death for himself, so by obedience to the will of God whoever will can obtain eternal life for himself”; Paul, however, wrote, “as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous to eternal life.” If this is a reformulation, it implies that Christ has been reduced to one link in a chain of obedient men or prophets. But I think it remains very unclear that there actually is an echo of Romans in this passage.

³² Not necessarily from the *Ad Autolyicum* itself but from a lost writing of Theophilus (see note 33).

³³ F. Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien Adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus*, Texte und Untersuchungen 46 (Leipzig 1930) 24–28, 58–65, 69–70.

³⁴ G. Ruiz, “L’enfance d’Adam selon Saint Irénée de Lyon,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 89 (1988) 97–111.

³⁵ Loofs (above, note 33) 94, 445.

³⁶ Grant (above, note 30) 99–103.

we must be careful in attributing a radically different Christology to one of his valued sources.

Theophilus, of course, does not explicitly refer to the incarnation of the Logos. He may, like Athenagoras, have refrained from presenting such doctrine openly for apologetic reasons. In downplaying this possibility, Grant seems to me to put insufficient weight on a passage in Theophilus where segments of John 1, 1–3 are quoted (*Aut.* 2. 22). For the quotation is followed by this remark: “Since the Logos is God and derived his nature from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills to do so he sends him into some place where he is present and is heard and seen. He is sent by God and is present in a place.” The immediate concern of Theophilus is to explain how it is that God could be said in Genesis to “walk in paradise.” The answer revolves around the theological motif that although God himself “is unconfined and is not present in a place” (*Aut.* 2. 22), his Logos is generated to communicate with the human race and “is present in a place.” Behind this language of Theophilus is a still older motif with roots deep in Greek philosophy and with rich developments in Philo, namely that God “contains (and fills) all but is not contained by anything.” This and related expressions were intended to explain how God could be both transcendent and immanent without resorting to unacceptable anthropomorphisms. And in Jewish and Christian apologetics they also helped to account for the theophanies of God in the Bible.³⁷

In developed Christian theology, however, the same set of ideas was used in addition to explain the incarnation as an instance of the divine presence of God in the world. This can be found set out in classic form by Athanasius in his treatise *On the Incarnation of the Word*: “For this reason the bodiless and incorruptible and immaterial Logos of God came to our realm; not that he was previously distant, for no part of creation is left deprived of him, but he fills the universe, being in union with his Father” (8). “He [the Logos] was not enclosed in the body, nor was he in the body and nowhere else. . . . But what is most wonderful is that, being the Word, he was not contained by anything, but rather himself contained everything” (17). In other words, in this period the attributes of the all-embracing spaceless God became the attributes of the Logos without qualification. It strikes me that what we have in Theophilus is a similar application of themes but in a more elementary form: God himself is not in a place, but his Logos is. As we have indicated above, Theophilus does not explicitly

³⁷ See W. R. Schoedel, “‘Topological’ Theology and Some Monistic Tendencies in Gnosticism,” in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, ed. by M. Krause (Leiden 1972) 88–108; “Enclosing, Not Enclosed: The Early Christian Doctrine of God,” in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition*, ed. by W. R. Schoedel and R. L. Wilken, *Théologie Historique* 53 (Paris 1979) 75–86; “Gnostic Monism and the Gospel of Truth,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, ed. by B. Layton (Leiden 1980) I 377–88.

speak of the incarnation in this connection or anywhere else. But the parallels leave that open as a distinct possibility. And when we find that these formulae about God and place follow a quotation of John 1. 1-3, it is natural to think that Theophilus also had in view the Logos made flesh (of John 1. 14) when he goes on to refer to the one who "is sent by God and is present in a place." His immediate concern, to be sure, is to explain the appearances of God to people in the Old Testament. But the standard teaching of the age (as exemplified in Justin) was that it was the same Logos who appeared to the patriarchs in the Biblical theophanies and who appeared in the flesh.³⁸ It is hard to believe that this was not in the mind of Theophilus after he had just drawn attention to the prologue of the Gospel of John.

Again Irenaeus may be of some help in this connection. In an important passage he quotes an earlier source: "He was right who said (*bene qui dixit*) that the immeasurable Father is measured in the Son; for the Son is the measure of the Father, since he contains the Father" (*Adv. haer.* 4. 4. 2). It is clear that for Irenaeus this includes the idea of the incarnation, for "the Father is the invisible of the Son, the Son the visible of the Father" (*Adv. haer.* 4. 6. 5). We have an early parallel, then, in which the language about God containing and not being contained is modified to cover the case of the incarnation as the visible manifestation of God. Loofs argues that it was Theophilus himself whom Irenaeus had in mind when he said "*bene qui dixit*."³⁹ It is hard to know how much to rely on Loofs' reconstructions, but the appearance of such themes in Irenaeus at least suggests that Theophilus' Christology is not likely to have been significantly different from that of Irenaeus himself.

It may be that we can also make out something of the earlier history of this reapplication of the language about God and place. For Philo had already dealt with the Logos who mediates between God and the elders of Israel as the "place where the God of Israel was standing" on mount Sinai.⁴⁰ Philo, of course, is referring to the Logos, itself the "place" of the world of forms,⁴¹ as the place on which God stood. Perhaps that is how one gets to the notion that the Logos in some sense "contains" the Father (scales God down, so to speak, to something that can make contact with our world). Conceivably Theophilus has advanced little beyond that in his thinking about the Logos. But it seems more likely that something like Philo's reflection on the Logos as the place at which God reveals himself in his theophanies was early extended by Christian thinkers to the Logos, who

³⁸ J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London and Philadelphia 1973) 157-66.

³⁹ Loofs (above, note 33) 17-18, 393-97.

⁴⁰ *Quaest. Exod.* 37; cf. 39, 45 (*Exodus* 24. 10). The Greek sources of Philo support the interpretation (*De conf. ling.* 96; *De somn.* 1. 62).

⁴¹ *De opif. mund.* 20.

became the "visible of the Father" (the "measure of the Father," the one who "contains the Father") and thus, by a natural reapplication of the imagery, himself "present in a place" not only in the theophanies but also in incarnate form. Theophilus' quotation of John 1. 1-3 in this connection should, I think, make it all but certain that he at least includes the incarnation (John 1. 14) as an element in the presence of the Logos in a "place." Christology, then, provides no certain clue to the presumed special Jewish affinities of Theophilus of Antioch.

III. Jewish Christianity in Antioch

We come finally to the question as to whether we have evidence of a long tradition of Jewish Christianity in the city of Antioch where Theophilus lived which may have inspired his work. This possibility has been worked out most fully by Grant in an article published in 1972 in a *Festschrift* for Père Daniélou.⁴² The study may be seen as an effort to support Daniélou's emphasis on the importance of Jewish Christianity in the early period.

Here Grant deals with all the names that can be connected with Antioch in the second century: Simon, Menander, Ignatius, Saturninus, Theophilus, and a few others. Behind Simon and Menander (antecedents of the Gnostic movement, according to writers like Justin and Irenaeus) Grant found "a modestly speculative form of Jewish Christianity." The evidence, however, is rather general; and, in the case of Menander, Grant makes this final admission: "We find nothing explicitly Christian. Indeed, there is nothing specifically Jewish." The admission is somewhat alarming in a paper that attempts to specify the Jewish-Christian background of these figures.

Ignatius' discussions of aberrant Judaizing Christians in his letters to the Christian communities of Magnesia and Philadelphia come next. These discussions are taken as probably casting light on the situation in Antioch (rather than Magnesia and Philadelphia) since Ignatius says that he actually found no such problems among the Magnesians and Philadelphians themselves. But Grant admits that Ignatius has a habit of talking in that vein about all the problems confronted in the communities to which he writes and that it does not prove very much (if anything) about the source of his information. Moreover, when it comes to actually describing the Judaizing in Magnesia and Philadelphia, Grant refers to the troublemakers in Magnesia in no more specific terms than that they saw Christianity "as necessarily based on Judaism." He also realizes that in Philadelphia it was (clearly, it seems) a case of "Gentile Judaizers." Since the encounter between Ignatius and the Gentile Judaizers of Philadelphia took place before Ignatius wrote to the Magnesians, it is more likely that Ignatius interpreted what he was told about the situation in Magnesia along the same

⁴² R. M. Grant, "Jewish Christianity at Antioch in the Second Century," *Recherches de science religieuse* 60 (1972) 97-108.

lines. In any event, it seems unlikely that we catch clear sight of a distinctive form of Jewish Christianity in Antioch from these notices.

Grant then goes on to deal with Saturninus as an Antiochene Gnostic who was reacting to Christianity in general and to Jewish Christianity in particular. But the evidence for opposition to Jewish Christianity seems to come down to noting the opposition in Saturninus to the God of the Old Testament (and at the level of detail to identifying as Jewish Christian the equating of Satan and the serpent by Saturninus). That is very fragile evidence. Similarly, there seems to be no very obvious connection between Saturninus, his presumed opponents, and the sort of theology that later appears in Theophilus. Yet Grant suggests: "The work of Saturninus implies the prior existence of the Jewish Christianity which Theophilus later expresses." Grant, of course, knows that if Theophilus shows opposition to Gnosticism, it is to Marcion (or the Marcionite Apelles) and probably Tatian. Numerous notes in his edition and translation of Theophilus make that clear.⁴³ Thus there is no evidence in the details of the text that suggests opposition to Saturninus in particular. And it is purely speculative to argue that the substructure of Theophilus' theology is the sort of thing to which Saturninus was responding. It is straining the evidence, then, to postulate a continuous thread of development through this material. Finally, when Grant concludes by noting that Axionicus of Antioch later in the century was a Valentinian and that Valentinus in turn was indebted to mystical Jewish speculation, it is clear that the connections being made are simply too tenuous to mean very much. The intermittent influence of various forms of Judaism on various forms of Christianity is what seems to be hinted at in some of this material rather than a continuous development of a distinctive form of Jewish Christianity.

Theophilus, then, is more likely to have derived the Jewish features of his exegesis from an encounter with a Hellenized form of Judaism at the intellectual level rather than from familiarity with Jewish modes of thought filtered through Jewish Christianity. And there is little in the Christology of Theophilus or in the theological environment of Antioch that would point in any other direction.

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⁴³ One example is referred to in note 13 above. Droge (above, note 28) 119-23, on the other hand, thinks that Theophilus is responding to criticisms of the Christian movement made by Celsus. If Droge is right, an even greater gap is opened up between Theophilus and his presumed Antiochene background.