

Reading Religions in the Ancient World

Essays Presented to Robert McQueen Grant
on his 90th Birthday

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DEATH AS LIFE AND LIFE AS DEATH: REVISITING ROHDE

James D. Tabor

I shall of course be standing, as we all stand, on the shoulders of
Rohde

—E.R. Dodds

Robert M. Grant's most fundamental and sustained instruction to his students was that one's original research should stem from one's own curious and independent thinking and inquiry emerging from two primary bodies of evidence—*primary sources* and *older classic secondary works*. He often commented that too many modern researchers were carrying out their scholarly work oblivious to the work of their predecessors, resulting in repetition of results often poorer in quality, despite additional and refined evidence, to what had been done fifty to one-hundred years before their time. When I first met Prof. Grant in 1972 he handed me a thick, manually-typed, mimeographed list of well over two hundred secondary readings for the M.A. qualifying exams in the Department of Early Christian Literature over which he served as Chair. One had the impression he had written it out from memory on his personal office typewriter that he used for all his writing. As I glanced through the pages I came to the sober realization that I hardly recognized one-tenth of the secondary works on the list, despite arriving at the University of Chicago with an M.A. in Christian Origins from another institution.¹ The list contained most of the important classic works related to the study of Christians origins set in its Greco-Roman environment over the past one hundred years or so. Prof. Grant explained that these works were considered essential for even a *basic* beginning in the field. He noted that since I already had earned an M.A. degree I had the option of immediately taking my qualifying exams over the reading list. I politely elected to spend the next two years reading. The oldest work listed was a book by Erwin Rohde titled *Psyche*, published in German

¹ Names such as Bieler, Bousset, Colpe, Cumont, Diels, Dieterich, Dodds, Farnell, Festugière, Gressmann, Jervell, Lietzmann, Nilsson, Reitzenstein, Preisendanz, Rohde, et al. I had somehow missed in my training up to that time.

in 1893.² I determined to work through the list in order of publication so that Rohde's work was the first one I tackled—in the English translation of W.B. Hillis.

Now over a hundred years since the publication of the first edition of Erwin Rohde's classic study *Psyche* in 1893, I find that the sage admonition that Prof. Grant passed on to me over thirty years ago still serves me well: Accordingly, in this paper I want to revisit Rohde with the intention of offering a summary of his insights and how they have a fundamental relevance to the pioneering work Prof. Grant has given us on the early Christian text *Ad Autolyicum* by the second century Christian bishop Theophilus of Antioch.³

Erwin Rohde, pupil of Schopenhauer and early friend of Nietzsche, describes his 600 page work in a single opening sentence of his preface: "This book offers an account of the opinions held by the Greeks about the life of the human soul after death." His subtitle was "The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks." Despite this description, in fact, Rohde's book is not primarily about Greek views of the "afterlife," in the way of, say, Cumont's *Afterlife in Roman Paganism*.⁴ Rather, Rohde develops a fundamental insight—that the view one takes of *death* is an essential interpretive key to understanding the development of Greek thought regarding the human and the divine. W.K.C. Guthrie, who wrote the preface for the English translation of the 8th edition of Rohde's *Psyche*, shares and builds upon Rohde's basic perception in his own classic presentation, *The Greeks and their Gods*.⁵

In this paper I want to revive and apply aspects of Rohde's analysis to the contemporary scholarly analysis of the categories of the human and the divine in Western antiquity, but more particularly to the ways such notions of humanity and divinity were taken up by Theophilus of Antioch as he set forth his view of Christ as a model of salvation.

Recent scholarly discussion of the "divine man" in antiquity has been largely an attempt to descriptively classify an incredibly diverse mass of data spread over about eight or ten centuries. Scholars have attempted to

² Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greek* (1893). Harper Torchbook edition with introduction by W.K.C. Guthrie, 2 vols. Trans. from 8th edition (1920), by W.B. Hillis (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

³ Robert M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch Ad Autolyicum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

⁴ Franz Cumont, *Afterlife in Roman Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

⁵ W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

draw together all materials which deal in any way with the conceptual, cultic, or socio-political relationship between humans and gods/goddesses.⁶ Thirty-five years ago Morton Smith, in a classic article titled, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus," surveyed the history of scholarship and warned us (particularly N.T. scholars interested primarily in Jesus and the Gospels) about the complexity of our collective "collecting" enterprise.⁷

Behind this mob of divine or deified men and their many varieties lay the Greek notion of gods as beings like men, possessing the human virtues to a higher degree, and possessing also gifts that men wanted, above all immortality and eternal youth. . . nothing in this complex was stable. As men's notions changed, so did their gods, and as the gods changed, so did the ways in which men might be thought to be like them or related to them."⁸

Smith puts it well. Humans want to be like the gods, but gods are, after all, created in the image of the human. The development of the "divine man" figure was part and parcel of the development of that world's imaginations and desires. Accordingly, we encounter many different patterns, with border-line cases and tie-ins from one "type" to another.

Still, with regard to this classifying enterprise we have made good progress in four areas, the last of which offers the most promise.

First, we have been able to compile fairly complete descriptive lists of our general types, or classes, of deities.⁹ There are the Olympian and Chthonic deities, who were never human or "mortal," though they might at times appear in mortal "disguise." There are the demi-gods, often born through union of a human and a god (or goddess), who were once "human" but have subsequently achieved true "godhood," of legendary status (Dionysus, Asclepius, Hercules). Then there are the heroes, which are primarily the local tutelary powers among the "dead," having been once human, but now revered for their powers. There are those of

⁶ The classic work is Ludwig Bieler, *THEIOS ANER: Das Bild des "göttlichen Menschen" im Spätantike und Frühchristentum*. 2 Vols. 1935–36, reprinted in 1 volume (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976). See also the helpful summary of Hans Dieter Betz, "Gottmenschen" *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 12, s.v. "Gottmenschen II".

⁷ Morton Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 174–99.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁹ See Smith "Prolegomena," pp. 181–82, as well as David Aune, "The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C.H. Talbert's What is a Gospel?" *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, eds. R.T. France and David Wenham, 2 vols (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981) 1:20–34.

historical times, whether magician, ruler, prophet, athlete, philosopher, *et al.* who present themselves, or are presented by others, as having become "divine." Finally, we have less extraordinary individuals and groups, who from a variety conceptual perspectives, and through an assortment of means, hope to obtain divine status.

Second, a fair amount of attention has been given to the ways and means of achieving apotheosis or deification. Here the list is varied and somewhat overlapping: divine parentage; drugs and diet; heavenly ascent; resurrection from the dead; cultic initiation; magical incantation; selection by the gods/goddesses; "natural" selection, and so forth.¹⁰

Third, we have begun to come to better terms with the variety of ways in which our data survives—literary materials in all their genres, cultic remains, magical rites, inscriptional texts of every type and purpose, and so on. We recognize that although one might find certain correspondences between these types of materials, and the ideas they reflect, great care and caution is in order.

Finally, we are aware of the need to work through this complicated mix/flux on a case by case, text by text, context by context basis. Our goal should be to understand how such categories functioned in the "construction" of religious "worlds." Categories of the "divine" and the "human" function less as clearly defined slots into which each candidate must be fit than as the opposite ends of a continuum within which many complex, varying, and even contradictory intermediate classifications are possible. Accordingly, attention must be given to "native" or "indigenous" contexts specific to the text or the evidence itself. There is a particular need to pay attention to polemical contexts and apologetics, as claims and counter-claims are often characteristic of our materials, particularly those of a textual nature. Such claims, or the debunking thereof, are put forth to accomplish certain ends. We must give careful attention to what is at stake in each situation. A truly complete picture of any given claim or case can best be understood in the light of contemporary anthropological insights into native systems of thought and classification, thus linking social experience, systems of classification and world-view.¹¹

¹⁰ Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, Sather Classical Lectures, Vol. 46 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979): 130–134.

¹¹ Here the important work of Eugene V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician?: Celsus and Origin on Jesus*, SBL Dissertation series, no. 64 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1982) provides a standard for a more nuanced and cautionary method of comparison.

Rohde wrote that his book is about the opinions held by the Greeks about the "life" of the human soul "after death." His language here is carefully chosen. He begins with Homer and ends with Plato and the later Greek philosophers. What he is essentially asking is how the Greeks understood *death* itself. Gods are immortal; humans die. The question is, what is the nature of that death? How was it understood? Or to put it pointedly, when did *death* come to be understood as *life*? As early as his preface Rohde explains the heart of his argument:

The conception of immortality in particular arises from a spiritual intuition which reveals the souls of men as standing in close relationship, and indeed as being of like substance, with the everlasting gods. And simultaneously the gods are regarded as being in their nature like the soul of man, i.e. as free spirits needing no material or visible body.¹²

Later in the book he offers the following summary of this essential point:

If the soul is immortal, it must be in its essential nature like God; it must itself be a creature of the realm of Gods. When a Greek says 'immortal' he says 'God': they are interchangeable ideas. But the real first principle of the religion of the Greek people is this—that in the divine ordering of the world, humanity and divinity are absolutely divided in place and nature, and so they must ever remain.¹³

Guthrie, like Rohde, describes his book in a single sentence: "an investigation into Greek views of the relations between man and god." He speaks of two contrasting "threads" in Greek thought:

...that there was a great gulf between mortal and immortal, between man and god, and that for man to attempt to bridge it was *hybris* and could only end in disaster, or that there was a kinship between human and divine, and that it was the duty of man to live a life which would emphasize this kinship and make it as close as possible¹⁴

On the one hand humans are told, "Seek not to become Zeus," "For mortals a mortal lot is right" (Pindar); while on the other hand, "Man's chief end is to put off mortality as far as possible" (Aristotle), "the completest possible assimilation to god" is the goal of philosophy (Plato). Echoing Rohde, Guthrie explains that he uses *god*, *divinity*, and *immortal*

¹² Rohde, *Psyche*, preface to the 1st edition, p. xv.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 253.

¹⁴ Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, p. 114.

as equivalents, because they were so considered by the Greeks. Humans are mortal; gods immortal. Accordingly, "to believe the soul to be immortal is to believe it to be divine. According to Guthrie, "if man is immortal, then he is god," this is a universal of Greek thought.¹⁵

Rohde's discussion of the development of what he calls the "cult of the souls" unfolds with this fundamental perspective in the foreground. In Homer death is the opposite of life, a dissolution of the body, and a descent of the soul to the shadowy world of Hades. In the well-known section of Book XI of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus calls up the dead from Hades, to a pit he has dug, by means of offerings and blood. It is more of a "seance" than a journey to the underworld. He sees the shades of various ones appear. They take a drink of blood to be able to speak. Antikleia, his mother appears, he tries to grasp her, she flutters out of his hands like a shadow. She says:

...it is only what happens, when they die, to all mortals. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, and once the spirit has left the white bones, all the rest of the body is made subject to the fire's strong fury, but the soul flitters out like a dream and flies away (11.218-22).¹⁶

The departed shade of Achilles tells him:

O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying. I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, than be a king over all the perished dead (11.488-92).

Rohde then discusses the special case of one being *translated* to the "Isles of the Blest." Menelaos is told:

But for you, Menelaos, O fostered of Zeus, it is not the gods' will that you shall die and go to your end in horse-pasturing Argos, but the immortals will convoy you to the Elysian Field, and the limits of the earth, where fair-haired Rhadamanthys is, and where there is made the easiest life for mortals, for there is no snow, nor much winter there, nor is there ever rain, but always the stream of the Ocean sends up breezes of the West Wind blowing briskly for the refreshment of mortals. This, because Helen is yours and you are son-in-law therefore to Zeus (*Odyssey* 4.560-570).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁶ Translations of Homer, *Odyssey* from the Loeb Classical Library edition, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924).

Rohde stresses that Menelaos does not die. This is important to his point. He is taken away bodily, and given the status, or "benefits" of a god or immortal, but essentially remains the same. He says the same for the so-called "cave deities," such as Trophonius, who experience a "subterranean translation." They are literally "alive under the earth," still close to humans and their affairs. In Homer, there are legendary notions of mortals joining the realm of the gods. Kalypso pleads with Odysseus to live with her and "be an immortal" (*Odyssey* 5.205-214). Ino called Leukotheia, had once been a mortal, but now is a goddess (*Odyssey* 5.333; cf. 6.280f). Ganymedes, "who was the loveliest born of the race of mortals, and therefore the gods caught him away to themselves, to be Zeus' wine-pourer, for the sake of his beauty, so he might be among the immortals" (*Iliad* 20:230-35). They join the realm of the gods, but without experiencing death, i.e., the dissolution of the body. Their status is miraculous and, accordingly, exceptional.

The dominant view of death that one finds in older Ancient Near Eastern texts, and thus running through much of the Hebrew Bible is remarkably parallel to these ancient Greek perceptions of human mortality and "divinity." Gilgamesh is admonished by the barmaid Siduri, regarding his quest for immortality,

The life you pursue you will not find,
When the gods created humankind,
Death for humans they set aside,
Life in their own hand retaining.¹⁷

Enkidu, Gilgamesh's friend who had died had already described the realm below as "The house which none leave who have entered it...wherein the dwellers are bereft of light, where dust is their fare, and clay their food" (*Gilgamesh Epic* 7.4).

In ancient Hebrew tradition humans are mortal and descend at death to Sheol, the shadowy realm of the dead from which there is no coming back (Job 14:10-12). It is described as a region "dark and deep," "the Pit," and "the land of forgetfulness" (Psalm 6:5; 88:3-12). The heavens belong to Yahweh and his court, while the earth he has given to the "sons of men," but "the dead do not praise Yahweh, nor do any that go

¹⁷ *The Gilgamesh Epic* 10.3, translation adapted from James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 90.

down into silence" (Psalm 115:16-18).¹⁸ Cases of those who escape the fate of Hades or Sheol, such as the Babylonian Uta-napishtim, or Enoch in the book of Genesis, are seen as exceptions, translated to another realm, but not serving as a pattern of salvation for human beings more generally.

Similarly, the Greek "Heroes," which Rohde traces from the 7th c. B.C., he understands to be once living men, who have died, but whose souls, after death, have experienced a higher life, akin to the gods. This he understands in sharp contrast to the Homeric notions. Yet, he stresses that such an idea of heroes and demi-gods has no essential connection with the idea of the immortality of the soul. In every case, the apotheosis of the hero is an exceptional and fresh "miracle," as he puts it. The "great gulf" between human and divine remains.¹⁹

Rohde traces the origins of the concept of the immortality of the soul, properly speaking, to the experience of "sacred madness" (*hieromania*) within the Thracian cult of Dionysos. The soul leaves the body, is in union with the god, and lives for a moment the life of divinity. He finds the refinement of the essential idea among the Orphics and Pythagoreans, who begin to speak of the divine spark within, of the body as an impediment, and of purifications of the "Titanic" elements. These elements, this essentially new view of the "human," Rohde then traces through Plato and the later philosophers. Rohde would have been pleased to add to his discussion the *lamellai* ("Golden Plates") had he lived to see their discovery in the past century. These "prayers" of the soul in the Hadean world, discovered in tombs in Crete, Thessaly, and Italy, and dating to the 4th century B.C., offer us our earliest glimpse of what becomes the "Great Confession" of late Western antiquity: "I am a child of earth and starry heaven, but from Heaven alone is my Home."²⁰

However one might evaluate Rohde's attempt to explain the *origins* of the notion of immortality of the soul, I think his main argument throughout the book deserves reemphasis. For a "mortal," in whatever period, for whatever reason, and through whatever means, to experience

¹⁸ See my broad survey, "What the Bible Really Says About the Future," in *What the Bible Really Says*, Morton Smith and Joseph Hoffmann, eds. (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), pp. 33-51.

¹⁹ Rohde, *Psyche*, I, pp. 137-138.

²⁰ See Herman Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Walther Kranz, 10th ed., 3 vols. (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1960-61), 1: 15-18.

translation to the status of deity, represents a recasting of what is old and what is new. On a simple level, as the satirist Lucian remarks, it simply makes heaven more crowded and increases strife among men, but more fundamentally there is a redefining of the human situation—that is humans are "immortals" who are "trapped," "fallen," or otherwise subject to mortal *conditions*. We can continue to investigate the ways and means of such transformations, the social and religious contexts in which such indigenous claims operated, and the particular structures of language from which various traditions draw—but the basic "shift" that J.Z. Smith analyzes, appears to be quite ubiquitous throughout the Mediterranean world in late antiquity.²¹

When death is understood, paradoxically, to be *life*, then what we have is not the mere "crossing of the bounds," or any other complex mix of "categories," but the ultimate collapse of the "great gulf," indeed the abolition of the category "human" itself. *There is no human, only divine*. We are left to then consider the various "conditions" into which "divinity" has fallen. The term "mortal," has nothing to do with death, *per se*, but becomes a *functional term* for Fate, finitude, and alienation from one's true nature and destiny. This, as Jonathan Z. Smith has so well put it, represents a significant and fundamental shift from the "archaic" to a "utopian" view of the human person that begins to increasingly characterize Hellenistic religious texts of the period.²² As the departed Africanus the Elder, ascended to heaven as an immortal, tells his grandson Scipio Africanus: "Surely all those [who die] are alive... who have escaped the bondage of the body as from a prison; but that life of yours, which men so call, is really death."²³

One might object that the dichotomy between mortal and immortal is somewhat arbitrary, one distinction among many. However, with Rohde and Guthrie, I understand it to represent the fundamental existential difference between human life as lived and experienced in the world, and the projected "better" life of the gods in heaven. In other words,

²¹ See in particular, "Good News is No News," in *Map Is Not Territory*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 23 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978): 190-207.

²² See his summary article with bibliography, "Hellenistic Religions," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, 15th ed.: 8:749-51.

²³ Cicero, *Republic* ("Dream of Scipio") 6:14. Loeb Classical Library, *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, trans. C.W. Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928). See the analysis of Georg Luck, "Studia Divinia in Vita Humana: On Cicero's 'Dream of Scipio' and its Place in Gracco-Roman Philosophy: *Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956): 207-18.

the term "immortal" refers not only so much to longevity, but this higher and better life "above" or "beyond." The cipher, "no death," becomes the focus since death is by all appearances the dissolution of life, following injury, disease, or the misery of old age. It is also the dissolution of activity and power in the world. Thus the "immortal life" of the gods/goddesses comes to stand for all that is good, beautiful, enduring, and powerful. In that sense "salvation" can be defined most succinctly as "escape" or "going home."

Rohde focuses on Greek thought, and the corresponding concept of "immortality of the soul." I maintain that the "Hebrew" view of "resurrection of the dead," as developed in Hellenistic times, is fundamentally parallel, despite the surface differences stressed by N.T. theologians.²⁴ The former view understands death as the release of the immortal soul from the prison of the body. The body is not the Self, but is perishable. Thus death is not death, but life, i.e., release for the divine Self. Resurrection of the dead is an apocalyptic way of affirming the same at the end of history, collectively, for the worthy group (mass apotheosis): release from the "bonds of decay," and transformation to immortal heavenly life (see Rom. 8:20–23).²⁵ In either case the body is "dissolved," and the essential Self is free from the conditions of Fate and finitude into which it has fallen, or to which it has been subjected. The differences are semantic and minimal. For most writers of late Hellenistic antiquity the Greek doctrine of the "immortality of the soul" permeates ancient Jewish and early Christian thinking about death and human mortality in such a profound way that the "native" category of "resurrection of the dead" is largely subsumed or reinterpreted to essentially mean the same thing—i.e., escape from the conditions of mortality.²⁶

²⁴ The dichotomy so widely touted by New Testament scholars between the concept of "resurrection of the dead," and the Greek ("pagan") view of "immortality of the soul," is a fundamental misunderstanding. The much celebrated article by Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul and Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament," in *Immortality and Resurrection: Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965): 9–53, reflects a misguided theological attempt, fundamentally driven by apologetics, to separate "Biblical" thought from that of the common cultural views of Hellenistic late antiquity. It is a distinction without a difference.

²⁵ See my comparative treatment, "Resurrection and Immortality: Paul and Poimandres," in *Christian Teaching: Studies in Honor of LeMoine G. Lewis*, ed. Everett Ferguson (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1981): 72–91.

²⁶ "Returning to the Divinity: Josephus's Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah, and Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 225–38.

The hero, philosopher, magician, or "son of God," who experiences the heavenly exaltation of a god or "immortal," becomes not the exception, but the model, an illustration of the "way." Plato's Socrates tells his students to follow in death as quickly as they can (*Phaedo* 61b). Africanus urges Scipio to "Strive on," realizing that his inner being is not the body, which he will shed, but is indeed "a god" that lives and moves, belonging to the eternal world above the mortal spheres. Paul tells the Christians that because "Christ" has escaped the mortal world and shed his mortal "clothing," that those who are attached to him in one spirit, whether living or dead, will experience the same at his Parousia, rising up immortal "to meet the Lord in the air" and thus "freed from their bondage to decay" (1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–54; Rom 8:21).²⁷ Paul is not so much affirming the "resurrection of the dead," as the *participation* of those already departed to Hades in the escape from death and mortality that comes with the appearance of Christ.

The three surviving books *To Autolytus* by Theophilus, sixth bishop of Antioch (c. A.D. 18) witness to an interpretation of the work of Jesus within these most compelling parameters set forth by Rohde. As Robert Grant succinctly observed in his critical edition and translation of this valuable work, "In almost every respect his apology is a defence of Hellenistic Judaism as well as of Jewish Christianity."²⁸ Theophilus gives no special emphasis to the redemptive work of Christ.²⁹ In his view Jesus is a model of human development, a second Adam, who like the first Adam was to progress, grow, become mature, ascend into heaven, and become God. Commenting on the creation of man in Genesis, Theophilus writes:

God transferred him out of the earth from which he was made into paradise, giving him an opportunity for progress so that by growing and becoming mature, and furthermore having been declared a god, he might

²⁷ One indigenous element of Paul's scheme is that the "creation itself" will also be eventually liberated from its bondage to decay as well. This is presumably based upon prophetic texts, such as Isaiah 65–66, that foresee a "new heavens and new earth" in which the mortal elements are completely dissolved and eliminated. And yet Paul still maintains the fundamental dualism of language (upper/lower, above/below, seen/unseen, mortal/eternal) that is characteristic of so many such texts of the period (2 Corinthians 4:18).

²⁸ Robert M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch Ad Autolytum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. xvii.

²⁹ See James D. Tabor, "The Theology of Redemption in Theophilus of Antioch," *Restoration Quarterly* 8 (1975): 159–71.

also ascend into heaven (for man was created in an intermediate state, neither entirely mortal nor entirely immortal, but capable of either state; similarly the place paradise—as regards beauty—was created intermediate between the world and heaven), possessing immortality.³⁰

When Theophilus says that humans are in an “intermediate state” he is speaking of their “condition” or placement in the cosmic scheme of things, not their essential nature—which is divine. It is clear that from a “developmental” point of view, Theophilus clearly thinks of humans as “gods” and he seems pleased to find this language in Genesis. Like other Christian apologists of his time he never directly mentions Jesus, though he quotes his teachings in the Gospels (e.g., III.13–14) and he is even familiar with Paul’s letter to the Romans (III.14). His understanding of Christology is apparently so thoroughly grounded in his view of humans as divine that salvation is understood as “obedience,” that is, a reversal of the “disobedience” of the first Adam in Paradise. What he implies is that Jesus pioneered that way by being obedient and that the same path of “redemption” is open to all humans by right of their divine nature.

Although other more sophisticated and nuanced formulations of the Christian view of salvation prevail in the centuries following Theophilus, his view of Christ and his work stand to illustrate how easily an essentially Hellenistic view of the divine and the human, coupled with basic “Sermon on the Mount” ethics, and popular Hellenistic-Jewish homiletics (namely polemics against idolatry and sexual immorality), can so well serve a Christian bishop in Antioch in the late 2nd century A.D.

³⁰ Translation by Robert M. Grant, *Theophilus*, II. 24, p. 67.