

PRAISE FOR *Orthodox Afterlife*

“In these days of moral relativism when it is assumed that all religions are basically the same and that everyone goes to a happy place when they die, it is salutary to be reminded of the Church’s abiding Tradition regarding judgment and the afterlife. John Habib has provided us with just such a reminder, combining Scriptural citations with stories of the saints and selections from their extant writings. The book thus offers a much needed antidote to the lethal error that there is nothing to fear after death for anyone, and that (as it were) ‘all dogs go to heaven.’ It is a treasure trove of our Tradition.”

—Fr. Lawrence Farley

Archpriest, St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Mission (OCA) in Langley, B.C.,  
Canada, and author of several Orthodox titles, including the  
*Orthodox Bible Study Companion* series

“There perhaps is no more important inquiry than that of the afterlife. By its very nature it is elusive, in the words of the Apostle, ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ And yet here in this refreshing study we find that a surprising and startling picture emerges: the afterlife or near-death ‘experiences’ of numerous saintly figures and others are remarkably consistent in their depiction of ‘what comes next.’ What is more, these experiences are far from speculative—they suggest an underlying and almost overwhelming unity with both Scripture and the Church Fathers. Whether or not one chooses to believe these accounts, what they have to say of the afterlife is in the least fascinating.”

—Fr. Daniel Fanous

Priest, Coptic Orthodox Church, and Dean & Lecturer in Theology/New  
Testament, St Cyril’s Coptic Orthodox Theological College, Sydney, Australia,  
and author of *Taught by God* and *The Person of the Christ*

“Impressive! That’s what this book is. It will open your eyes—as it did mine—to a whole new level of understanding of what life after death will be like. This book presents a thorough analysis, based on the actual near death experiences of several individuals and supported by solid Biblical and patristic evidence, of one of the least understood topics in Christianity—the afterlife.”

—Fr. Anthony Messeh

Priest, St. Timothy & St. Athanasius Coptic Orthodox Church in  
Arlington, VA

“Recent years have seen a great deal of speculation about the afterlife, much of it unreliable and not in conformity with the tradition of the ancient Christian Church. John Habib brings us personal accounts of afterlife experiences of Orthodox Christians along with a comprehensible treatment of the Orthodox Church’s views on this important but obscure topic. This glimpse into both heaven and hell may surprise and will certainly convict you. Heaven is indeed for real—but not everyone will end up there.”

—Katherine Hyde

Editor and author

“In his book *Orthodox Afterlife*, John Habib has done a superb job of illuminating some of the most difficult and mysterious aspects of death and the afterlife. The stories contained within are quite edifying regardless of whether one accepts them to be historical fact or modern day parables. His treatment of the subject matter is generally thorough and quite faithful to the spirit of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. John offers us a powerful reminder that we were meant for more than this life.”

—Fr. James Guirguis

Priest, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in New Hartford, NY and  
author of *Ask for the Ancient Paths: Discovering What Church Is Meant to Be*

“Orthodox Afterlife offers a glimpse—based on various personal accounts—into what happens to us when our spirits leave this physical world and return to God our Creator. John Habib backs up these accounts with references from the Holy Scriptures, sayings from the early Church Fathers, and other historical accounts of saints. Many people wonder what happens after death; this book attempts to answer that question in accordance with various people’s near-death experiences and what they each saw. The descriptions of Paradise and Hades are fascinating and should serve as reminders for us all to strive to live holy lives in this world so that we may inherit the kingdom of God, which our Lord is preparing for us.”

—Fr. Anastasi St. Antony

Hegumen and steward of the St. Antony Monastery in Newberry Springs, CA

“John Habib has provided a guide to Orthodox Christian beliefs on the afterlife as viewed especially in the Coptic tradition. It provides biblical grounding, historical treatments, and modern narratives and reflections about the crossing over from this life to the next, whether to light or darkness, depending upon whether one has been by grace ready to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It relates many instances both ancient and modern of Orthodoxy’s attestation of the afterlife, including the experiencing of God’s Light, and the beauty of Paradise. It will be read by Orthodox believers as a familiar and reassuring teaching for the faithful, and by non-Orthodox as an intriguing and puzzling compendium of hypotheses implausible to some but quite plausible to others.”

—Dr. Thomas C. Oden

Former Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics at Drew University, prolific author, and general editor of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series

ORTHODOX AFTERLIFE: SAMPLE PAGES



# ORTHODOX AFTERLIFE

2,000 Years of Afterlife Experiences  
of Orthodox Christians  
and a Biblical and Early Christian View of  
Heaven, Hell, and the Hereafter

**John Habib**



Orthodox Afterlife: 2,000 Years of Afterlife Experiences of  
Orthodox Christians and a Biblical and Early Christian View of  
Heaven, Hell, and the Hereafter

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ORTHODOX  
AFTERLIFE

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# Abbreviations

- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1885–1896).
- NPNF<sup>1</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, Philip Schaff, ed. (1886–1889; reprinted frequently).
- NPNF<sup>2</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, ed. (1890–1900; reprinted frequently).

# Foreword

By His Grace Bishop Youssef

*Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the  
Southern United States of America*

The afterlife is a mystery to all of us. Christianity in general tends not to seek answers by mere speculation or guessing, but relies instead on divine revelation to arrive at reliable observations about matters that are beyond our understanding. If God reveals something to us about such mysteries, then that is to be considered true. For the truth about the afterlife, we know what the holy, divinely inspired Scriptures have already revealed.

Beyond that, however, there are some to whom the afterlife has been exposed in some way and who have shared their experiences with us. The question then becomes, how should we read such accounts? Above all things, we must eliminate whatever contradicts the Holy Scriptures. Anything else which does not contradict Scripture, yet is spiritually beneficial, can be considered for spiritual reflection and meditation. Nevertheless, there is one caveat we must abide by: we cannot teach anything as Church doctrine which is not derived from the apostles and Scripture, and therefore the reader is entitled to make his or her own personal assessment about the deductions and conclusions derived from the afterlife accounts in this book. Let me assure you, however, that the author has exerted tremendous effort to ensure the contents of this book are in alignment with biblical teaching and the doctrinal traditions of the Church of God.

But what purpose does this book serve? It is not meant to simply

satisfy our human curiosity about the unknown. It has been compiled with the intention of alerting all of us to be ready for Christ's Second Coming, as He warns us: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Mt 25:13).

I thank the author for having taken the liberty to write this book for all of us to benefit from. I pray that the Holy Spirit accompanies every word in this book for us to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Mt 3:8) and so that, "when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 Jn 2:28), through the intercessions of Saint Mary, Saint Mark, and all the saints. Amen.

# **PART ONE**

## *Introduction*



## Understanding the Mysteries Herein

To me . . . this grace was given, that I should preach . . . the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. (Eph 3:8–12)

**A**ncient Egyptians have always been fascinated with unraveling the mysteries of death and the afterlife. For thousands of years, they collected their varied beliefs in writings and inscriptions which are collectively known as the Book of the Dead. Those beliefs were suddenly discarded about two thousand years ago when a messenger from God known by the name of Mark (the Evangelist) taught my ancestors about the true path of salvation, through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Egyptians who worshipped idols eventually were counted among God's people, as was prophesied hundreds of years before Christ was born in a manger. It was none other than the great prophet of Israel—Isaiah—who delivered the message (Is 19:1, 19–22):

Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, / And will come into Egypt; / The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, / And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.

\* \* \*

In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. Then the LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the LORD and perform it. And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

Thus, the ancient Egyptian symbol of life—the ankh †—was replaced with the true symbol of eternal life—the cross †.

I am the proud descendent of that rich history and owe my Christian beliefs to the fulfilled prophecy of God and the efforts of His apostle Mark. Yet, although we Egyptians learned of the true way of salvation, my ancient heritage crept into the present and has led me to wonder about what happens immediately after death and how to prepare for the journey. But that was not always the case. Although I am a Christian, I was not always a devout one. When I was in college, I could not have cared less about life after death, or at least I slowly drifted into passive acceptance that it did not matter. Then one night my mother showed me a copy of a document that altered the course of

my life. It has also changed other people's lives and is the catalyst that has led me to write this book some fifteen years later. That document contained an account, written in his own handwriting, of what is touted by many to be the afterlife experience of an Egyptian (i.e., Coptic) Orthodox Christian monk known as Father Botros (whose experience and life story can be found in Appendix A).

After that fateful day, I set out to examine the veracity of what Father Botros wrote and I challenged my entire belief system as follows: if Orthodoxy is true, then all bona fide Orthodox Christian afterlife accounts or early Christian writings on the subject must be in harmony with each other. Therefore, I limited my search to Orthodox Christians, which includes the shared collective heritage of the Catholic and Orthodox Church before the Great Schism between east and west traditionally dated to the eleventh century, as well as those Christians since then who strictly define themselves or are regarded specifically as Orthodox Christians. Because Orthodox Christians can trace their Christian practices and beliefs all the way back to the time of the apostles, they retain stories of Christian experiences that span the two millennia from the beginning of Christendom to the present, including afterlife accounts that have been lost, forgotten, or unintentionally neglected by many in recent times. The truth is (I came to learn) Christians have been narrating their afterlife experiences since the time of the apostles.

As you might have guessed, I am an Orthodox Christian—Coptic Orthodox to be specific. I will admit that when I first read Father Botros's writing, there were a few aspects that were quite novel to me. However, as I collected all the reliable ancient and contemporary stories and writings about the afterlife I could get my hands on, from all over the world, I was astonished to find that the most novel aspects of his story were in fact the most commonly understood

beliefs pronounced by the early Christians, yet which have somehow evaporated, to a great extent, from the collective consciousness of Christians today. Each afterlife experience I came across not only fit within the paradigm of my belief system, but at the same time provided intricate, mystical details about the hereafter that I had not known before. And they all seemed to be saying the same thing.

Instead of just recounting one person's afterlife experience, the several accounts provided will allow you the opportunity to compare and contrast their stories with each other, to assess their homogeneity and determine whether or not that amplifies their cumulative credibility. It is not my intent to impose upon you that you must believe every afterlife experience you will read, but rather it is left for you to determine that for yourself.

Furthermore, in order to set a solid Christian foundation for all of this, you are provided an abundant collection of teachings from the Holy Bible, along with an expansive selection of early historical Christian writings on the subject, to further elaborate on the ancient Christian understanding of the afterlife. Those will be provided throughout the book so that you can assess whether or not the afterlife experiences recounted adhere to the tenets of Christianity. (Moreover, as you read you may want to refer to Appendix C, which provides a glossary of Orthodox people and terminology mentioned in this book with an explanation for each.)

Now, for those who may feel apprehensive, considering this subject too speculative to be written about, allow me to leave you with one concluding remark made by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. AD 335–395) when he too set out to write about matters that had no clear answer:

For my part, in view of the difficulties of the subject proposed, I

think the exclamation of the Apostle [Paul] very suitable to the present case, just as he uttered it over unfathomable questions: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord?” [Rom 11:33–34].

But seeing on the other hand that the Apostle [Paul] declares it a peculiarity of him that is spiritual to “judge all things” [1 Cor 2:15], and commends those who have been “enriched” by the Divine grace “in all utterance and in all knowledge” [1 Cor 1:5], I venture to assert that it is not right to omit the examination which is within the range of our ability nor to leave the question here raised without making any inquiries, or having any ideas about it. . . . I assert . . . it is . . . well . . . to introduce a certain order into the discussion and to lead the view on from one point to another.<sup>1</sup>



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# **PART FOUR**

*The Abode of Light and Joy*



## Paradise

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Mt 25:34)

**A**t the outset, I want to make clear that I cannot possibly give you an exact physical description of Paradise. St. Paul, tells us he was “caught up into Paradise<sup>1</sup> and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor 12:4). Referring to Isaiah, St. Paul says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9).<sup>2</sup> Hence, although people have had opportunities throughout time to observe features of Paradise, no one can truly behold and express in human words the vast glory and wonder of what awaits us. St. Clement contemplates on this and says:

How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness! And all these fall under the cognizance of our understandings [now]; what then shall those things be which are prepared for such as

wait for Him? The Creator and Father of the ages, the Most Holy, alone knows their amount and their beauty.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, this chapter is an attempt to relay various aspects of Paradise at a glance, while at the same time keeping in mind that its magnitude and awe can never be truly captured with the inherent limitations of human language. It is an unalterable reality that unlimited beauty cannot be conveyed by a finite mind.

This does not mean we cannot at least make an attempt to give an account in words of what God reveals to us about Paradise. St. John tried describing his revelation from God to us. Likewise, those who have experienced visions of the afterlife can do their best to illustrate what they saw with the words that do exist. The late Bishop Youannis tells us in his book entitled *Heaven* that “God has revealed to some of the saints on earth a great extent of the majesty and glory of heaven,” such as He did with St. Stephen (Acts 7:55–56) and the apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:4).<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the ages, visions and revelations have been declared to the martyrs, saints and confessors of the Lord Jesus, confirming the reality of the existence and glory of heaven. These visions and revelations motivated those martyrs in facing their ordeals and hardships, thus they stood firm to the end, until they received their unfading crowns.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, not only have saints been exposed to visions of Paradise, but (as Bishop Youannis also attests to) many “contemporary people” have taken a glimpse of this mysterious place: “If we come to our present world, we find stories that have actually happened and are

worth mention.”<sup>6</sup>

Before I proceed, I would like to share with you what the great St. Anthony (or quite possibly his disciple Ammonas)<sup>7</sup> tells us about why some are given the unique blessing of seeing heavenly visions:

God dwells in those who have abhorred the world, and even themselves, and who have carried the cross. He feeds their souls with a joy that enriches them and makes them grow noticeably. Among those who accept this celestial joy are a few to whom God reveals His heavenly secrets. He also shows them their celestial positions while they are still in the body. Such people have boldness before Him and He gives them all that they ask for. They are gifted with talents and help people. In every generation, some people have reached that status. And the coming generations will continue to have examples of such people, not only among men, but also among women. Each one of them will be an example to his or her generation and condemn it, because these people struggled until they became perfect.<sup>8</sup>

It is helpful to remember those remarks when examining the sources of the stories that follow.

### **What Is Heaven?**

The Orthodox Church distinguishes mainly among three different “heavens” alluded to in the Holy Bible. The first is the sky—the area comprising the earth’s atmosphere, where the “birds of the air” fly (Gen 1:26) and where we see clouds that bring us the “rain from heaven” (Gen 8:2). This area which is directly above the earth was termed “the face of the firmament of the heavens” where “birds fly

above the earth” (Gen 1:20) in the story of creation. This is the “face” of the firmament, because it marks the beginning of the second heaven, which is called the “firmament.”

The firmament refers to the area beginning at the edge of the earth’s atmosphere and extending into and all through the whole material universe in the space outside the earth. This is regarded as the second heaven. God created stars, the sun, and the moon and placed them in this firmament: “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.’ . . . Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day [i.e., the sun] and the lesser light to rule the night [i.e., the moon]. He made the stars also” (Gen 1:14, 16).

The third heaven is what the Church refers to as “Paradise.” That was where the Church considers St. Paul is said to have ascended to when he spoke about himself saying, “Such a one was caught up to the third heaven . . . he was caught up into Paradise” (2 Cor 12:2, 4). The third heaven is what Christ referred to when He told the thief who was being crucified to His right, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43).<sup>9</sup> As mentioned before, Paradise is that level of heaven where the spirits of those who are righteous and deemed worthy of being with God ascend after death as they await His final judgment.

The Bible seems also to refer to a fourth “heaven,” often designated “the heaven of heavens,” which seems to be distinct from and greater than the other three heavens mentioned previously. The late Bishop Youannis writes:

Despite the absolute belief that God is present everywhere, the Holy Book constantly describes God to be present in a higher

place that is more glorious, which is heaven. . . . The Lord Jesus, glory be to Him, when speaking to Nicodemus, says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). In this way, despite the belief that God’s presence is everywhere, He is always described as being [in that place—the heaven of heavens].<sup>10</sup>

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III likewise teaches the following:

The psalmist said about it: “Praise Him, you heavens of heavens” (Ps 148:4). . . .

All the heavens that humans have reached are nothing compared to the heaven of heavens. For this reason, it was said about our Lord [that He], “Has passed through the heavens” (Heb 4:14), “And has become higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:26).

Solomon the Wise mentioned the heaven of heavens on the day he consecrated the temple. He said to the Lord in his prayer: “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You” (1 Kg 8:27). This heaven of heavens, no human has ascended to. The Lord alone came down from it and again ascended to it. Proverbs say[s]: “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? . . . What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?” (Prov 30:4).

Therefore, the heavens that the Bible mention[s] are [as follows]:

1. The heaven of the birds.
2. The heaven of the stars, the firmament.
3. The third heaven, or Paradise, and
4. The heaven of heavens to which no human has ever

ascended.<sup>11</sup>

Having said this, I do not want anyone to be confused and think that God is not present in Paradise. God is omnipresent and is not limited by any place. From the stories that follow, you will see the extent of God's presence in the afterlife as all await Christ's Second Coming. As you read on, you may want to join me as I ponder about Paradise and how much it may be different from the "new heaven" and "New Jerusalem" which St. John saw (in Revelation 3:12; 21:1–2) as the final, eternal abode of all the righteous after the end of the world.

### **Further Clarifying the Distinction Between Paradise and Heaven**

In what you are about to read below, you will find a number of verses that describe aspects of what we will observe in heaven (in the future, after the day of judgment) applied to what various sources evince are likewise, to some degree, observable in Paradise now. What are we to make of this? Is there no distinction in what we see and receive in Paradise, and what we await to experience in heaven?

A strictly Orthodox perspective affirms a distinction between the two, and despite all the similarities (which you will read about below), what is allotted to those in Paradise is regarded as a pledge for a greater and more splendid allotment in heaven, after our physical bodies reunite with our spirits in the second resurrection, on the day of judgment. An exemplary view on this subject can be seen in the following excerpt from St. Augustine:

All souls have, when they quit this world, their different receptions. The good have joy; the evil, torments. But when the [second] resurrection takes place, both the joy of the good will be fuller and the torments of the wicked heavier, when they shall be

tormented in the body. The holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and good believers, have been received into peace; but all of them have still in the end to receive the fulfillment of the divine promises; for they have been promised also the resurrection of the flesh, the destruction of death, and eternal life with the angels. This we have all to receive together; for the rest, which is given immediately after death, everyone, if worthy of it, receives when he dies. The patriarchs first received it . . . ; the prophets afterwards; more recently the apostles; still more lately the holy martyrs, and day by day the good and faithful. Thus some have now been in that rest for long, some not so long; others for fewer years, and others whose entrance therein is still less than recent. But when they shall wake from this sleep, they shall all together receive the fulfillment of the promise.<sup>12</sup>

As you read further, please be sure to remain cognizant of the distinction between heaven and Paradise, even as you observe their apparent similarities.

### **Progressing to Paradise with the Angels**

Let us return to the journey of our spirits after death. First, our spirits leave our bodies, and then a struggle over our fate ensues. We have already explored one possible outcome of this struggle—Hades. Now we will focus on the Paradise of Joy, prepared for those who are deemed worthy of awaiting Christ’s Second Coming there. (Notice that while an abode of punishment was made for the devil [cf. 2 Pet 2:4], an abode of joy was “prepared for you” [Mt 25:34].) It is impossible to predict the exact manner or moment the ordeal in the Crossover Realm will end, revealing that we will be allowed to enter into Paradise by God’s grace. However it happens, let us proceed and learn what we can by looking through the eyes of those who have

beheld the wonders of Paradise.

### Robes, Hymns, and Otherworldly Chants

The stories that follow reveal that the righteous are clad with bright, heavenly robes; some of those stories also seem to manifest that such robes are given to cover ones that our spirits had been clad with during life, and which had been made filthy by our sins over time. This brings to mind the story in the Book of Zechariah regarding how he saw the high priest Joshua standing before the Angel of the Lord.

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.” (Zech 3:3–4)

St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. AD 335–395) refers to this story and gives his impression that it is “teaching us by the figurative illustration that verily in the baptism of Jesus all we, putting off our sins like some poor and patched garment, are clothed in the holy and most fair garment of regeneration [through our own baptism].”<sup>13</sup>

This is reflected in the Book of Revelation when the Lord Christ tells us about the “white garments” which we should keep “white,” which we are to be “clothed” in when we stand before Him: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Rev 3:4). “I counsel you to buy from Me . . . white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed” (Rev 3:18). “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and

keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Rev 16:15).

Also, in the Book of Revelation, St. John saw “one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel” as well as “a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” who were all “clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev 7:4, 9). He writes elsewhere about “twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes” standing “around the throne” of God (Rev 4:4).

\* \* \*

Let me now share a story that may help reveal more on this subject.<sup>14</sup> His Holiness Pope Shenouda III had a close friend from his youth named Fayez. Fayez’s daughter, Layla, was therefore also close to His Holiness throughout her life, whom she knew as Uncle Nazer when he was still a layman (and often unwittingly referred to him by that same name even after he was ordained a bishop). There was a time when Layla stopped going to church as often as she should and therefore stopped partaking of Communion due to her job at the time.

She tells a story about a dream she experienced one morning. She saw His Holiness at the door of St. Mark’s church in Alexandria. He was there to give the sermon he typically would give on Sundays. Layla met him at the door of the church before he entered and asked

him to pray for her. His Holiness responded, “Okay, Layla. Come, and I’ll pray for you.” So he prayed for her and said, “Look Layla, I’m going to give the sermon, and [in the meantime] I want you to cry earnestly from your heart and say ‘O Lord’ three times. And when I come back, . . . tell me what you saw.”

Layla said, “Okay.” She followed the pope’s advice and fervently cried out “O Lord” three times. Suddenly she saw the martyr St. George on his horse, and although she was dreaming, she heard the pattering of his horse’s hooves almost as if she were awake. St. George was holding a large sword with which he began to swat at innumerable flies and mosquitoes that were hovering all around her until all of them were killed.

Then St. George looked at her and said, “It’s done,” and disappeared. His Holiness had completed his sermon and, returning to Layla, asked her about what she had seen.

She explained everything. Then His Holiness asked her what seemed to Layla like a peculiar question: “Would you like to see your image as God sees you right now?”

Perplexed, she responded, “Yes, of course. Is there anyone who wouldn’t want to see that?” Suddenly she found herself wearing a dress that was torn up and not very clean. She was surprised at how unappealing her attire was. So she asked His Holiness, “Is this really how I look?”

“Yes, this is your image as God sees you.”

Layla also could see patches that looked new, so she inquired, “What are these new patches that have been put into my robe?”

His Holiness told her, “These are the good things you have done in your life.”

So then she asked, “Well, how do I make this robe white and clean?” She truly did not like the way she looked at all, having thought

all this time that God saw her with utmost beauty and glamour.

His Holiness sort of laughed and told her, “Layla, by Communion, by the blood of the Lamb this robe will become white.”

As you read the stories that follow, notice how often you hear of some white attire covering the spirits of those in Paradise. . . .

I hope you enjoyed this sample.  
The full-length book includes dozens of compelling afterlife experiences, and extensive research yielding over 400 endnotes with a bibliography covering over 100 different sources.

To learn more, or to purchase a copy, visit [orthodoxafterlife.com](http://orthodoxafterlife.com)



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# Notes

## CHAPTER 1. UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTERIES HEREIN

1. Gregory of Nyssa *On Infants' Early Deaths*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series* 5, Philip Schaff, ed. (1886–1889; repr. New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc., 2007), 374–75; henceforth cited as NPNF<sup>1</sup>.

## CHAPTER 6. PARADISE

1. St. John Chrysostom clearly understands this experience as being that of St. Paul and believed that the “Paradise” he was caught up into was the same place that Christ mentioned to the thief as being the place where he would go with Christ after death. John Chrysostom. *Homily on 2 Corinthians* XXVI.1–2. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series* 12, Philip Schaff, ed. (1886–1889; repr. New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc., 2007), 398–99; henceforth cited as NPNF<sup>1</sup>.
2. His Grace Bishop Youssef indicates that while this latter verse (“no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”) is traditionally regarded by the Coptic Church as being associated with Paradise, it is possible it actually refers to the glory prepared for us in heaven, which follows Paradise. Certainly the previous passage where St. Paul speaks about being caught up to Paradise and the inexpressible words he heard there relate to Paradise specifically.
3. Clement of Rome *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 35 (ANF 1:14).
4. H.G. Bishop Youannis, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Los Angeles, CA: Saint Paul Brotherhood, 2007).
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. The Coptic corpus includes twenty letters which in Arabic are attributed to St. Anthony the Great, evident from the notes in the Arabic manuscripts, as well as from a reference by the late medieval Coptic encyclopedist Abu-l-Barakat

Ibn Kabar to a Coptic version of twenty letters by St. Anthony still extant in his lifetime. One of these additional letters is found in a quotation in the writings of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite. According to Greek and Syriac sources, however, only seven letters are attributed to St. Anthony the Great, but the others to Ammonas, his disciple. A Coptic version of all seven letters is attested by Jerome, who writes about seven letters translated from Coptic into Greek. Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (London, ENG: A&C Black, 1995), 16.

8. According to this source, authorship is attributed to Anthony the Great, from his Thirteenth Letter, The convent of the great martyr St. Philopater Mercurius, *Tamav Erene and Glorious Horizons in Monastic Life, Part II* (Old Cairo, Egypt: The Convent of the Great Martyr St. Philopater Mercurius “Abi Seifein” for nuns, 2009), 61.
9. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III expresses how, when the Lord responded “in Paradise,” He was correcting the theological error of the thief to his right who asked to be in His “kingdom,” delineating a difference between Paradise and the kingdom of heaven, the former being the temporary abode of the righteous, and the latter serving as their eternal abode after the day of judgment. H.H. Pope Shenouda III, *The Seven Words of Our Lord on the Cross* (El Kawmia, Cairo: Dar El Tebaa, 1991), 32–33.
10. H.G. Bishop Youannis, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Los Angeles, CA: Saint Paul Brotherhood, 2007).
11. H.H. Pope Shenouda III, *Many Years with the People’s Questions, Part I* (El Kawmia, Cairo: Dar El Tebaa, 1993), 78–79.
12. Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 49.10 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 7:273–274).
13. Gregory of Nyssa *On the Baptism of Christ* (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 5:522–523).
14. This was translated and adapted from a video recording in my possession of an interview of Layla, conducted by the Coptic television station known as CTV, which aired on or around April 1, 2012.