



Afterlife: A History of Life after Death

By Philip C. Almond

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Afterlife: A History of Life after Death By Philip C. Almond

The end of life has never meant the extinction of hope. People have always yearned for, and often been terrified by, continuance beyond the horizon of mortality. Over many centuries various imaginative and sometimes macabre ideas have been devised to explain what happens to human beings after death. As Philip C. Almond reveals in his new and zestful history of the hereafter, whichever image or metaphor has been employed by visionaries, writers, philosophers, or theologians, it has tended to oscillate between two contrary poles: the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. This pendulum movement of ideas and language reflects the contending influence of the Hebrew Bible and of ancient Greek thought and the often tense encounters, skirmishes, and compromises between them.

Exploring this polarity, and boldly ranging across time and space, Almond takes his readers on a remarkable journey to worlds of both torment and delight. He travels to the banks of the Styx, where Charon the grizzled boatman ferries a departing spirit across the river only if a coin is first placed for payment on the tongue of its corpse. He transports us to the legendary Isles of the Blessed, walks the hallowed ground of the Elysian Fields, and plumbs the murky depths of Tartarus, primordial dungeon of the Titans. The pitiable souls of the damned are seen to clog the soot-filled caverns of Lucifer's domain even as the elect ascend to Paradise. Including medieval fears for the fate of those consumed by cannibals, early modern ideas about the Last Day, and modern scientific explorations of the domains of the dead, this first full treatment of the afterlife in Western thought evokes many rich imaginings of Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Limbo.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This book is a history and geography?and occasionally a politics?of heaven, hell, and other options for the afterlife in Western thought and imagination. It meticulously charts a huge range of recorded beliefs . . . from ancient Greek and Hebrew origins through Christian history to the present. . . . What it achieves . . . is impressive, and will be fascinating for anyone interested in this aspect of Western history."?Vernon White, *Times Literary Supplement* (4 November 2016)

"In this concise and accessible account of the afterlife in the imagination of the Christian West, Philip C. Almond takes the reader on a remarkable journey. . . . As we progress through the centuries, wrestling with the conceptual problems of postmortem life?will our bodies as well as our souls enjoy paradise? what exactly is the soul? and what is the relation between time and eternity??we marvel at the tenacity that has compelled human beings in all cultures to insist on this seemingly impossible idea."?Karen Armstrong, author of *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means* and *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*

"As is true of all his previous books, Philip C. Almond's *Afterlife* is thoughtful, perceptive, inquiring, accurate, wide-ranging, clear, and engagingly written. It is a fine follow-up to his earlier biography of the Devil."?Jeffrey Burton Russell, Emeritus Professor of History, University of California, Santa Barbara, author of *A History of Heaven* and *Paradise Mislaid*

"Philip C. Almond's cultural history of the afterlife is a fascinating?and frequently disturbing?journey through the Western imagination: its dreams, desires, fears, and hopes. Staring at death and finitude, humankind aspires to and tries to picture postmortem conditions: a perennial occupation that cannot be erased. It is who we are. In his engaging book Almond offers us a road map to self-understanding."?Graham Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Oxford

About the Author

Philip C. Almond is Associate Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (Research) and Professorial Research Fellow at the Centre for the History of European Discourses at The University of Queensland. He is the author of many books, including *The Devil: A New Biography* and *Afterlife: A History of Life after Death*, both from Cornell; *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill*; *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*; and *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*.

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