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### Angels and the Future of the Elect

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ANGELS AND THE FUTURE OF THE ELECT

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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By  
Tina Ziemnick  
May 2006

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As a Director of Christian Education in a parish, I encountered many youth and adults who believed that people become angels at death. As I talked with them, I realized that they were looking for comfort and hope in a world filled with uncertainty and tragedy. They wanted a picture of eternity and this notion of dying and becoming an angel made the concept of eternal life tangible. As I talked with other DCEs and Pastors I found that they had similar conversations with members of their congregations.<sup>1</sup> The frequency of these conversations within my professional meetings as well as during Bible studies I led in my own congregation began to reveal the significance of the belief in people's lives. It seemed people were comforted by the thought of their dead loved one protecting them as their 'guardian angel'.<sup>2</sup> It became apparent that they were willing to trade a dead loved one's identity as created man or woman for an angelic identity at death. More of a concern, their hope and security were placed in a created being, an 'angel' (dead person), rather than in God through Jesus Christ.

Attempting to research this idea, I found no material directly addressing the issue. It is my intention that this thesis will investigate the potential origination of the belief and its development into a common belief within Christianity specifically in Lutheran circles.

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<sup>1</sup> I served as a Director of Christian Education (DCE) in the Ohio District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from Oct. 1998 to Feb. 2002. I believe my experience is still relevant in 2005 since I have conversations with Pastors, DCEs and DCOs that express the same experiences with members of their congregations believing that when a man dies he will become an angel.

<sup>2</sup> This belief has similarities to ancestor worship in traditional religions. The spirits of dead people are a functioning principle in most of them, from the popular Japanese Shinto/Buddhist belief to some traditional African religions. Although there are similarities with these other religions, this thesis will focus on Christian traditions that tend toward the belief that men transform into angels when they die.

Moreover, the thesis will offer some possible ways the church might clarify Paul's proclamation in 1 Corinthians 15 that we will live eternal life in material bodies.

The investigation will examine three areas. The first area is the possible origin for the modern-day belief that men become angels when they die, focusing on the development of the early church from the patristic age into the Middle Ages. The second area is American society's concept of human nature in life and death; this will be looked at in relation to media icons<sup>3</sup> and the understanding of human nature in life and death as presented by Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.<sup>4</sup> The third area is the effects this belief has upon the First Article aspects of faith as well as the entire *corpus doctrinae*. Here, the Christian life *coram hominibus* will be examined. It is possible that this belief could cause trouble *coram deo* as well, but this idea will not be pursued, due to the limitations of this specific study. Instead, the injurious effects of this notion on creation, specifically on man and his relationships, *coram hominibus* will be the focus of this thesis.

Dr. Robert Kolb has stated, "When man finds his identity, security and meaning in a created creature, an idol, and not in God, the idol is unable to bear the weight and ultimately will break under it."<sup>5</sup> People who believe that humans die and become angels rely upon created beings for their hope and security. Man is stripped of hope in his life if his trust is placed in a frail foundation such as himself or angels. As the church has always professed, if God is the

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<sup>3</sup> Oprah Winfrey is an example of a media icon that this thesis will investigate.

<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, the highly respected Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross did studies with terminally ill patients on the experience(s) of death and dying. At the end of her career, she stated that she had been groomed through all of her research for the most important task: to share the 'truth' that death does not exist. This is found in her book, *Life after Death* (Berkeley: Celestialarts, 1991). Although she is known for her work with death and dying, this study will not focus on her views of a person's experiences in the stages of dying, but rather focus upon her research and beliefs on life after death.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kolb, "Our Living Faith II" Lecture. Class presented at Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1991.

Creator of all things, He is responsible for everything. No created being may play that role. Indeed without God being in control of everything, salvation through faith in Christ would be in vain.

The reality of angels has never been questioned within the church catholic. Angels appear in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and can take a form that is heavenly or human.<sup>6</sup> Yes, Scripture does speak occasionally of human beings as angels. An appropriate example of this can be read in Luke 7:24, when *angelos* is used to describe the men John sent to Jesus. This usage simply reflects the wide meaning of ‘angel’ as one who delivers a message. It must remain clear that Scripture never speaks of dead human beings as angels.<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Kittel states, “the main New Testament reference is to angels as divine messengers and heavenly representatives.”<sup>8</sup>

It is possibly because the church catholic believes in the existence of angels that questions have arisen in each age about the relationship of humans and angels. The Jews and some early church fathers believed that angels were co-creators with God.<sup>9</sup> The first chapter of this thesis will investigate two specific beliefs which developed within the anagogical hermeneutic during the Middle Ages. The first belief linked human creation with the rebellion of the angels. God created a perfect number of angels prior to the creation of man, but when the angels rebelled, vacancies were created within the ranks and these vacancies needed to be filled.

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<sup>6</sup> In Isaiah 6:2ff, Isaiah records his encounter with unnamed heavenly beings. In the apocryphal book of Tobit, Raphael portrays an angel who takes on human appearance to accomplish the task ordained by God. (Tobit 12:1-22.) In Luke 1:26ff, Luke’s report of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary doesn’t give a physical description; nonetheless, when artistically drawn, he is invariably given human characteristics and sometimes wings.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16–22. The belief remained until the church addressed the Arian heresy at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, maintaining that God was the creator of everything, including the angels, even though Genesis was silent on the matter.

Therefore, God created humans to fill these vacancies. The second belief interpreted Luke 15:8–10 to reveal humans to be the tenth angelic rank.

Angels have not always played a prominent part in the church or society. Ron Rhodes states that prior to the 1990s, “angels were relegated to Christmas cards and manger scenes, ... but in recent years angels have moved directly into the mainstream of American society.”<sup>10</sup> As stated in the preface of the second printing of Billy Graham’s book, *Angels*, there were no other books on the shelves about angels when the book’s first edition was written in 1975. Graham notes the change as he writes, “In early 1994 the *New York Times* bestseller list included eight separate books on the subject of angels.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, the second chapter of this thesis will argue that although angels may not have been prominent enough to be noted prior to the 1990s, they played a subtle role in the decades prior to the 1990s in television, cinema and books. Stemming from this role in popular culture, the second chapter will conclude that it has also become more commonplace for people to view angels as dead human beings rather than “divine messengers and heavenly representatives” as Kittel has determined.<sup>12</sup>

The second chapter will also investigate the studies of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a well-known researcher in the area of death, dying, and life after death. Kübler-Ross does not concur with Kittel’s definition of angels; she supports and acknowledges the ability of a spirit to interact with living human beings. She identifies these spirits as dead human beings. And so, she claims to refute the reality of death.

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<sup>10</sup> Ron Rhodes, *Angels Among Us* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1994), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Billy Graham, *Angels: God’s Secret Agents*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994.) xii.

<sup>12</sup> Bromiley, 13.



This research will lead into the thesis's third chapter: a consideration of the dangerous effects this belief can have in present-day living and in a person's faith. It may seem that this belief is an inconsequential concern for us, today, with many other problems facing the church, but the chapter will contend that if this belief is ignored or denied as a problem, it has the potential to unravel true faith in Jesus Christ.

It cannot be denied that this belief will have consequences within the right-hand realm, *coram deo*, but this thesis will specifically consider the dangers posed within the left-hand realm, *coram hominibus*. It is not the author's intention to completely explore the threats posed by this belief, but the thesis will point to potential areas of concern, especially those involving a denigration of the First Article of the Creed.

It may seem that the correct understanding of eternal life is not threatened by misunderstanding the nature of angels. But as will be seen through the first three chapters of the thesis, the repercussions are more serious and more probable than one might initially think, primarily because the attack is not directed solely against the nature of angels, but more accurately against the nature of man.

The conclusion of the thesis will focus upon what Scripture and the Symbols of the Lutheran church say about the future of the elect. Although the majority of the thesis will focus on incorrect understandings about the future of the elect, it will be the goal of the final chapter to provide an orthodox view of the eternal destiny of the believer, not as an angel, but as a perfected human body and soul.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15 and selections in Job. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 19-20: "Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, He was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God's spiritual-physical creatures."

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORY

The understanding that a man will die and become an angel is acknowledged and highly accepted in the contemporary American culture.<sup>1</sup> It may for that reason appear as if it is a new twist in spirituality developed recently by a spiritual, but not solely Christian, American society. Yet, it would be a mistake to believe that American society, Christian or not, would come up with a new heresy totally separate from the former heresies within the church and world. Therefore, it may be possible to find connections between false teachings the church has reckoned with in the past and this modern notion which suggests that a man will become an angel when he dies.

This chapter will consider the influence that Plato's philosophy had upon the development of the Christian faith from the third century through the Middle Ages in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries into the present twenty-first century. This may indicate a foundation for the current popular belief that man dies to become an angel.

To provide a basic foundation for the rest of the chapter, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Plato's "Analogy of the Cave"<sup>2</sup> and its effects upon man's view of his

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is based on various conversations with pastors and fellow church workers who serve in multiple locations throughout the United States with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They acknowledge this belief as one frequently encountered in their ministerial duties. These workers have experienced instances when counseling families in preparation for funerals, when talking about death and dying or when teaching a class with discussions about eternal life. Oprah Winfrey, a highly regarded contemporary leader in American society and its popular culture, stated on her show, "Oprah" on September 20, 2001 that on September 11, 2001 the world had 3000+ new angels. (Harpo Productions Oprah: "Tribute to Loved Ones," 20 September 2001.)

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (London, Penguin Publishing 1955), Book VII.

Creator, as well as his own body and soul. Next, this chapter will examine the corollary between Augustine's philosophic bent in Neo-Platonism and its impact on the direction of the Christian church structure. The majority of the chapter will consider Bonaventure's application of Pseudo-Dionysius' and Gregory the Great's<sup>3</sup> distinctions regarding the celestial hierarchy and examine its significance in the development of the Middle Ages' ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Along with this focus, the chapter will concentrate on the fourfold exegetical process used specifically in the Middle Ages that helped determine the understanding of the relation of humans to angels. Specific attention will be given to the anagogical hermeneutic, the most important aspect of the fourfold exegetical process according to Bonaventure. Bonaventure, a Franciscan monk, will be considered since he is of the monastic order which strangely believed that their beloved founder, St. Francis of Assisi, had encountered a seraphic crucified Christ and upon his death, Francis himself had become a seraph. In fact, Francis was thought to be the sixth angel in the book of Revelation.

In the conclusion of the chapter, a brief look into Maslow's hierarchy of needs will seek to illustrate how Neo-Platonism has been carried into the twentieth and twenty-first-century thinking about the life lived in body and soul.

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<sup>3</sup> Keck, 57. Dionysius the Areopagite was a vessel by which the Christian Platonism of the early church was transmitted to the Middle Ages. He paved the way for Christian mysticism and believed in humanity's eventual deification. He argued that there is a hierarchical pattern in the whole universe. Gregory the Great is the theologian who declared that different orders of angels have different responsibilities and that no matter what rank of angel; all angels are able to have contact with humanity. This differed from Dionysius who said that only archangels interacted with humans because of the limited communication between the various ranks, each rank only being able to talk with the one below, rather than with all, including humanity. See Keck 56 – 57.

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastical hierarchy refers to the church structure, constructed during the patristic age and continued into the Middle Ages. For example, the office of priest was considered more desirable than the office of husband, as well the office of a monk was considered more spiritual than the office of priest.

The philosopher Plato alleged that the true 'Real' or reality was not found in the material plane, but rather found in the spiritual plane. For this reason he argued that if man was to advance toward the true 'Real,' he would need to ascend from the material plane to the spiritual plane. Consequently, as long as man was bound to the material plane in any way, it would be absurd for him to believe that he could attain anything different than what he was experiencing.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, man would ultimately hate his body because it limited his ability to achieve total spirituality. For this reason, Plato rejoiced in the death of the body.

Plato identified that the true 'Real' would be found in the pure spirit, 'god'. This god is not to be confused with the Triune God, for Plato's 'god' was not the God who created everything that exists, but rather his god was pure spirit,<sup>6</sup> which laid the philosophical foundation for what was later to be called Gnosticism. Plato would never acquiesce to a belief that his god created matter because the philosopher believed matter was created evil. Instead, Plato endorsed the belief that emanations coming from god created the world. These emanations were capable of creating evil since they were creatures and not pure spirit.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth-century church father, Augustine of Hippo, was most significant in blending Neo-Platonism with the Christian belief in the Triune God. Augustine identified Plato's true 'Real' not just in god, but rather in the mind of the Triune God. Believing

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<sup>5</sup> Plato.

<sup>6</sup> "God" was an impersonal force which had no effect on the creation, which had been accomplished by less-pure emanations from the pure spirit, possibly considered angels.

<sup>7</sup> Ed L. Miller, *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003).

that traces of the divine image remained in the human soul after the Fall, Augustine reasoned that the human soul could ascend higher than the body toward the mind of God.

Therefore, Augustine asserted that interacting with the material plane would most likely be bad or evil. For example, the pleasures of the body were temptations to the evil which would lead man into sin.<sup>8</sup> As Kathryn LaCugna argues in her book, *God for Us*, Augustine's Neo-Platonic perception of life caused him to focus on the spiritual aspect of life, not only in human beings but also within the Godhead.<sup>9</sup> Augustine focused upon the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which LaCugna calls the *theologia*. Augustine's concentration on the *theologia* persuaded the Christian church to change its focus more toward God's relation within Himself. In the first three hundred years of the Christian church's teaching, the focus remained on the narrative of God's *oikonomia*, God's action within His creation accomplishing His plan of salvation for His creation. The change in focus to *theologia* assisted the Christian church in addressing the Arian heresy, determining that the Father and the Son were *homoousious* (of the same

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<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961). It is correct to say, "In early works Augustine often speaks of the soul 'using' the body. His thought and language, however, evolved to the definition that the human person 'is a rational substance consisting of soul and body' inseparably. (Trin. 15.7.11). In his later years Augustine acknowledged that 'the ideal is not escape from the body and the world, but reestablishment of inner equilibrium by unification of all one's levels of being, which includes the body's spontaneous submission to the soul.' Yet, he would still in his later years maintain his young personal experience and philosophical background to insist that sexual desire is the one 'great force' that defies integration and clashes with reason, and more with the will." Allan Fitzgerald, O.S.A., General Ed. *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1999), 26.

It is possible that some of the resources for this thesis chapter, when referring to Augustine are considering the young Augustine, which may oversimplify the theologian's thoughts by not considering how ideas may have changed through Augustine's personal experience and study.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: Claretian Publications; San Francisco: First HarperCollins paperback edition 1993), 7 – 9.

substance) and not *homoiousious* (of similar substance).<sup>10</sup> This was helpful and appropriate for the argument against Arius, but also allowed Augustine's new spiritual focus to take root permitting Neo-Platonistic thinking to promote the denigration of the material plane and fortification of the spiritual plane. This inspired man to admire reason and aspire to involve himself with activities considered spiritual for the purpose of growing closer to God. Since the patristic fathers considered angels and humans nearly related in God's creation they concluded that if they studied angels, anthropology would be illuminated.<sup>11</sup>

Genesis' silence on when and where angels were created intensified a problem for orthodox theology against the Neo-Platonist theologians who purported that the angels created the world. Thus, one can readily recognize Augustine's fascination with the creation, fall and confirmation of the angels. Augustine's focus upon these three events is explicitly seen in his work *City of God*.<sup>12</sup> The Neo-Platonist argument stated that god, pure spirit, would not create a world with imperfection. They legitimized their belief by interpreting the 'us' in Genesis 1:26–27 to be referring to the angels. Some first century Jews (Barabas and perhaps Josephus) had seen the 'us' in terms of God's assistants, the angels.<sup>13</sup> Since the creation of angels was not recorded in Scripture, it was reasonable to

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<sup>10</sup> The Arian heresy was dealt with at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, where the Church fathers wrote the Nicene Creed, stating that God the Father and God the Son were of the same substance.

<sup>11</sup> Keck, 16.

<sup>12</sup> This occurs specifically in the second half of the book, in the exploration of the City whose citizens are both saints and angels.

<sup>13</sup> Keck, 20.

presume angels were the creators, or at least participated in the creation, of the world.<sup>14</sup> Although Augustine believed that the ‘us’ in Genesis 1:26–27 referred to persons of the Trinity, he continued to struggle with the angelic hierarchy and their involvement with humanity.

While the Council of Nicea addressed this issue in A.D. 325, declaring that the church believed in God, the maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, the questions about angels and their function in the world were not completely answered. The Council’s declaration did not address the topics of emanations or angels creating the world or when, where, and how the angels were created. Hence, the perceived connection between angels and humans remained. Man still desired to understand himself, and angels provided one way to address his questions. Therefore, theologians continued to speculate about angels and their creation, fall and condemnation.<sup>15</sup>

These investigations led theologians into deep studies of angels and angelology—not just their role in creation but also their relationship and involvement within the ranks of angels which Scripture explicitly categorized. Although Augustine saw distinctions and relations between the nine ranks of angels, he was ready to confess his ignorance as

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<sup>14</sup> “Out of these debates, the early church asserted ‘the doctrine of God as Creator unequivocal.’ In 325, the two hundred plus bishops who met at Nicea to address the crisis of the Arians made the first major church pronouncement concerning angels. The prelates did not even refer to angels by name. They declared the church’s belief in God, ‘the maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.’ According to the Fathers, God created the angels despite the apparent silence of Genesis.” *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Keck correlates the patristic and Middle Ages study of angels to the current study of simians within evolution, used to gain more insight into the nature of human beings. *Ibid.*, 16.

to how they related to each other and humanity.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Augustine took more interest in the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. Neo-Platonic aspects of Augustine's view of God deemed this spiritual aspect more important than the previous studies of God's involvement with His people. Yet, rather than leading people away from spiritualization of their lives, Augustine led them deeper into thinking about angels, as he simultaneously expressed his lack of knowledge about how the angelic ranks interacted and challenged his fellow theologians to explain it.<sup>17</sup> Along with the interaction between the ranks of angels, it became common to examine angelic relations with humans.

Augustine's challenge to explain the relationship between the different ranks and to investigate deeper spiritual thoughts was overwhelmingly answered. By the Middle Ages, it was not unusual to consider angels part of daily life.<sup>18</sup> Angels appeared in iconography. Many who were unable to read used iconography to understand and edify their faith. The passages in Isaiah, Genesis, and Revelation describing angels with wings became useful in such iconography, allowing the portrayal of winged angels in orthodox depictions. Paintings began to include these winged creatures so that one could distinguish between a saint and an angel.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Keck, 54, fn 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>19</sup> The Greco-Roman figure of Nike became the model for the angelic wings. Other distinctions were made, such as saints being portrayed as wearing some sort of shoe or sandal while angels, sons, or apostles were portrayed barefoot. Ibid., 30. Although the distinction is made it is to be noted that the saints being portrayed with some sort of shoe or sandal were not dead.



It was a point of study to rank the angelic orders, and in most, the seraphim was the highest order, considered the rank closest to the throne of God. The rest of the ranks were ordered in various ways depending upon which theologian created the order. Yet, by the Middle Ages two theologians, Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory the Great, had each solidified a celestial hierarchy consisting of nine ranks. Both orders were accepted by scholastic theologians. With all the analysis of angelology it became ordinary to hear about the angels and their involvement with humanity. The fourfold process of exegesis promoted the continuation of reading and studying angels in various passages of Scripture, whether the literal text mentioned angels or not.<sup>20</sup> Bonaventure, being a theologian of the Middle Ages, utilized all four of the aspects of exegesis.

Following well-established traditions, Bonaventure defines the three spiritual levels of exegesis that, combined with the literal level, comprised the fourfold scheme for reading Scripture: “Allegory consists in this: that one thing signifies another thing which is in the realm of faith; moral teaching, or tropology, in this: that from something done, we learn another thing that we must do; anagogy, or lifting up, in this: that we are given to know what to desire, that is, the eternal happiness of the elect.” Such multiple levels of Scripture, he contends, are in harmony with the origin, purpose, content, and audience of God’s revelation.<sup>21</sup>

The particular form of medieval exegesis which predominantly fueled the study of angelology was anagogy, set up during the patristic age as the hermeneutic for

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<sup>20</sup> Keck gives examples of how this happened in Middle Ages paintings as he states, “In addition, because of the important precedents set by Raphael’s concealing of his nature, the constant use of anagogy, and the fact that angels are often invisible (as in the story of Balaam and his ass), it was possible and indeed appropriate for medieval artists to depict angels in scenes narrating the life of Christ even when they did not appear in Scripture, such as at the marriage of Cana.” *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

angelology. For example, the early church fathers understood the creation of angels to have occurred on the third day of creation. Although, following the literal hermeneutic principle, Genesis is silent about this, the fathers' anagogical study concluded that when Scripture referred to the creation of the 'heavens' it was referring to the creation of the angels. Anagogy, the mystical or spiritual interpretation of Scripture, became the standard hermeneutic for angelology.<sup>22</sup> Bonaventure found this form of exegesis most important when reading the Scriptures.<sup>23</sup>

In the Middle Ages there were two ways to anagogically conclude human beings were or would become angels.<sup>24</sup> Both ways are related to the fall and condemnation of the angels. The first medieval concept believed that God had created a perfect number of beings with the creation of the angels. Some of this creation rebelled, however, thus creating vacancies within the perfect number which needed to be restored. Therefore, humanity was created to restore that perfect number of creation. According to this understanding, a human being would die and fill the vacant angelic seat. This would happen within all of the angelic ranks, with the exception of the seraphic rank, since it was commonly understood that the seraphim could not sin because they are the rank

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<sup>22</sup> The Greek *anagogikos* means "that which leads up." *Catholic Dictionary* <newadvent.org> last referenced April 26, 2006. This hermeneutic most frequently refers to eschatological things, things hoped for, or reference to eternal life. E.g., when the anagogical sense is applied to a Scriptural reference to Jerusalem, it is typical for Jerusalem to be interpreted as referring to the church triumphant.

<sup>23</sup> Keck, 49.

<sup>24</sup> There is evidence in Boethius' writing *On the Catholic Faith* in the seventh-century that man was created as a replacement for the fallen angels. Boethius writes, "and because the Creator did not wish the number of the angels, to remain diminished, he formed man out of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life;" Boethius. *Boethius: The Theological Tractates: On the Catholic Faith* S. J. Tester trans. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918) 57.

closest to God and complete in love.<sup>25</sup> The prophet Ezekiel confirms this belief when he writes that Lucifer is a cherub, not a seraph.<sup>26</sup> The second concept held that humanity began its existence as angels. According to this concept, instead of vacancies being left in the ranks when the angels rebelled, one entire rank of angels rebelled. Humanity was this angelic rank, now trapped in a corporeal state as punishment for its rebellion. Upon corporeal death humanity's angelic identity would be reclaimed. Hence, freedom from the body is accomplished when the body dies.

Anagogical exegesis assisted this understanding by interpreting the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15:8–10 as having an eschatological meaning. This anagogical meaning was constructed in conjunction with the literal and tropological understanding of Scripture which had determined that God had created nine ranks of angels.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the coins which the woman held represented these nine ranks of angels. The lost coin which was the object of the woman's house-wide search was the tenth lost rank of angels—humanity. The other ranks have names, i.e. seraphim, cherubim, principalities, and thrones. The last rank also has a name, 'humanity'. Both concepts of human beings dying and becoming angels conclude eschatologically on the Last Day; whether nine or ten angelic ranks, the angelic ranks will then be complete.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>26</sup> Ezekiel 28:14ff

<sup>27</sup> Using an anagogical hermeneutic to interpret the Scriptures is not unusual. Aquinas, following Augustine's lead read "light" in Genesis 1:3 as 'angels'. Keck, 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> Boethius writes, "and the sole reward of blessedness is the contemplation of the Creator, so far, that is, as the creature may look on the Creator, to the end that the number of the angels may be restored from these and that heavenly city filled where the Virgin's Son is King and where will be everlasting joy, delight, food, labour, and unending praise of the Creator." *On the Christian Faith*. ... 71.

The idea of dying and then becoming an angel became a prominent thought in the Middle Ages. Whether, on the one hand, man will change his ontology when he dies and become angelic or, on the other hand, whether humans were created as the tenth rank of angels, the final result is that man will be an angel when he dies. This belief was illustrated by the Franciscan order's conviction that St. Francis of Assisi became an angel when he died.

St. Francis professed only to his close friends that he had encountered the seraphic crucified Christ on Mt. Averna.<sup>29</sup> During this encounter St. Francis is to have experienced a unique reception of the stigmata.<sup>30</sup> Because St. Francis was said to have been blessed with this gift, the Franciscan order believed that Francis of Assisi was an angel and is, in fact, the sixth angel in the book of Revelation.<sup>31</sup>

Up to this point in the chapter the word 'angel' has been used without definition, but has been understood as meaning a unique being created by God. It is now necessary to address a definition of this word and to attempt to sort the confusion which may arise from two different understandings of the Greek word, *angelos*.

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<sup>29</sup> Although it may be commonly accepted in homiletical use to consider the Old Testament reference to the "Angel of the LORD" to indicate the pre-incarnate second person of the Trinity, it is strange in the thirteenth-century AD for the church to consider Christ to be angelic since He has become incarnate. St. Francis' reception of the stigmata was significantly different than other receptions, since the markings and suffering remained with him after he left Mt. Averna.

<sup>30</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia* <newadvent.org> Last referenced April 23, 2006 for references regarding St. Francis and stigmata.

<sup>31</sup> While beyond the confines of this study, a specific explanation of how the Franciscan Order arrived at this belief warrants more study especially with reference to how this understanding may possibly effect the modern day belief of men being angels. It is clear that the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Catholic church, along with Pope John XXII, was not in favor of this belief and disciplined a particular group for their strong adherence to this belief. St. Bonaventure spent much of his time studying St. Francis and this particular order in the Catholic church to restore the Franciscan Order back to the graces of the Pope. Keck, 152-156.

The general meaning of *angelos* is: a messenger or one sent from God. The second meaning is a specific sort of creature which God created. The first meaning, messenger, is an official title and can be applied to any creature that God gives a message to proclaim. In this use of the word 'angel', men such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the prophets would appropriately be called angels. Yet, because of confusion between the created beings of humans and angels, this more general meaning of the word 'angel' is not often used. It also can be noted that when this term is applied<sup>32</sup> in its general meaning the humans referred to are alive. The second and commonly understood meaning of *angelos*, is a specific being created by God within the six days of creation. This definition describes a unique creature which God made, different from any other being of creation including the human creature. These creatures have been known to deliver messages from God to His people. Therefore, these specific creatures fulfill both definitions of *angelos*.<sup>33</sup> This becomes confusing when theologians and interpreters begin to speak of Christ as an angel or of other men, such as St. Francis, as being angels. Although it may seem superfluous to maintain a distinction between a general meaning and a specific meaning of the word *angelos*, it is necessary to be explicit when discussing any use of the word 'angel' to describe a man.

In a conversation with Dr. Charles Gieschen about his published dissertation *Angelomorphic Christology*, he shared his understanding that man or Christ is able to

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Gieschen uses the word angel to describe these patriarchs of Scripture in his published dissertation, *Angelomorphic Christology*.

<sup>33</sup> A few examples are: Gabriel at both the announcement of John's birth (Luke 1:5-20) and at the annunciation of the Messiah (Luke 1:28-38), or the seraphim in the Call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:7).

hold the office of a messenger and appropriately be called, an *angelos*.<sup>34</sup> His dissertation argues that Christ has taken angel characteristics such as the Old Testament references to the “Angel of the LORD.” But he would argue that it is incorrect to say that Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state or incarnate state is ontologically in the narrow definition an angel, for truly Jesus Christ is true God and true Man, not true angel.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it can be confidently stated only that St. Francis had a strange spiritual encounter with a seraphic crucified Christ, Who brought the gift of the stigmata, but that Jesus remains true God and true man, not an angelic being. Although this was said of Jesus, Who is true God, the medieval theologians transferred this belief to St. Francis and came to believe that St. Francis was indeed an angel.<sup>36</sup> The Franciscans believed that this status had been given by Christ in the strange experience Francis related having had with the seraphic crucified Christ; which they accepted by the evidence of a unique reception of the stigmata. Although angelology in the Middle Ages remains a topic to be studied further, it would seem that the Franciscan spirituals created the condition for an intertwining of Franciscan poverty and Joachite prophecy.<sup>37</sup> As relevant research has

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology* (Concordia Theological Seminary of Fort Wayne, 1998). Dr. Gieschen was kind to speak with me about my thesis on October 5, 2004 at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN about his dissertation and this specific issue. Many of my quotes from him will be from the notes which I took during this visit, rather than found in his written material, since my topic was different than what his dissertation addressed.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, 14. 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed.

<sup>36</sup> Keck, 144 – 145.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 152. Bonaventure and Franciscans found that by being ambiguous, they could retain Francis' identity as an angel while not upsetting those outside the order. Others such as Olvi followed in these Franciscan footsteps speculating that the seven angels with seven trumpets of Apocalypse 8:2 referred to the doctors of the church. The Joachite prophecy was of three ages. The first age brought in by Abraham, the second age brought in the by the Son of God, and the third brought in by St. Francis. Because of this

shown thus far, the majority of theologians outside of the Franciscan order understood angels to be unique beings created by God different than human beings, which means that St. Francis could not, then, be the sixth angel in the Apocalypse.<sup>38</sup>

No matter whether Francis was considered an angel in his earthly life or in death, somehow the idea of man dying and his ontology being transformed into that of an angel seems to have carried into the Reformation. This idea can be observed in the notes taken by a student during one of Luther's sermons. This student, well versed in the theology of the time, interpreted Luther to have stated this precise belief, as he wrote, "At the resurrection day before we have a chance to look around we will all be beautiful angels."<sup>39</sup> It cannot be documented if Luther actually stated these exact words since the quote is traced to a student's notes in the Weimar edition of *Luther's Works*. According to Robert Kolb, who supplied a needed translation, this is an exact quote from Luther's student as he was listening to one of Luther's sermons. Within the context of the quote, it would seem that the student believed that when men died they became angels.<sup>40</sup> This comment seems to imply that men do not hold an official title of messenger *angelos* when they die. Rather, since it is in the context of resurrection day, the meaning would imply a new ontological being, *angelos*.

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Francis is considered the 6<sup>th</sup> angel of Revelation. Steve Ozment. *Age of Reform* (London: Yale University Press 1980), 108.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 416 fn 52. WA 36, 349.

<sup>40</sup> It would be incorrect to assume that Luther believed that men died and became angels and stated it in this sermon, since the quote is taken from a student's notes on the sermon, rather than a direct transcript of Luther's sermon.

Angelology of the Middle Ages, together with Neo-Platonic thought, would seem to lend itself to an ontological understanding of man becoming *angelos* rather than merely an official title of *angelos*. The patristic and medieval monastic vows focused on a separation from material matter, deemed by Neo-Platonists as bad, toward a spiritual existence, deemed by Neo-Platonists as good. The continuation of this procedure was promoted by Bonaventure's model of the seraphim titled "On the Six Wings of the Cherubim."<sup>41</sup> The seraphim with their six wings<sup>42</sup> were a model of how God wanted men to live their lives. In this tropological approach, man is encouraged to advance through the ranks of angels gaining the gifts each rank bestows. Each wing is a level at which man is able to attain a closer relationship with God. Each wing contains five feathers that act as objectives toward achieving the 'goal of each wing'.<sup>43</sup> As man attains the first pair of wings, he understands his guilt and emotion in his devotion. With the second pair of wings, he undergoes purification of the body and mind. And finally, with the third pair of wings, a love for the neighbor and for God is achieved. "Thus," Steve Chase writes, "the teaching is grounded in an anthropology of body, mind and heart, an ethic of forgiveness, perseverance, courtesy, chastity and a contemplative practice insisting upon

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<sup>41</sup> An error was made in the title, for the cherubim are described as having four wings, where the seraphim are described as having six wings. Since the title has six wings, the Cherubim is incorrect. Some authors such as Keck correct the title and make a note about the error in the Medieval period.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah's encounter with the seraph described two wings to cover the face, two wings to cover the feet and two wings with which to fly with: six wings. Steve Chase, translator *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 32-34.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34. See Appendix 1.



the integration of the natural and material world, one's neighbor, one's soul, the celestial spirits and God."<sup>44</sup>

One of Bonaventure's areas of focus was the soul's journey to God. The six-wings of the seraphim were a key in this journey, and helped to explain the eschatological roles of Francis and the order.<sup>45</sup> As Bonaventure meditated on the seraphim, he saw it developing into a formula for ecclesiastical hierarchy and leadership.<sup>46</sup> The ecclesiastical hierarchy was built upon ranks of higher spirituality. Bonaventure would argue that the Franciscan order would be the earthly equivalent of cherub rank. And yet he would maintain St. Francis was of the seraphic order.<sup>47</sup> Although this was confirmed as heresy, future theologians after Bonaventure continued the belief about Francis being the sixth angel of the Apocalypse, in the seraphic order. It is undeniable that during the thirteenth century it was commonplace to interchange saint with angel. Hence, when a saint died it would be common to call him an angel and determine a rank in which he stood.<sup>48</sup>

Neo-Platonic thinking continued in the twentieth century. Although it may manifest itself differently in this century, it is well illustrated in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.<sup>49</sup> This model was developed in 1943 and became popular in 1954 as it was widely

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 144.

published in *Motivation and Personality*.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Augustine and the Franciscan Order attempted to deny and flee the material plane to become more spiritual, Maslow supported the acceptance of the material plane and encouraged that effort be given to satisfy its needs, which could be used for ascending toward a more spiritual level of living. Although the acceptance of the material plane is different in each model, the *Six Wings of the Cherubim* and Maslow's hierarchy of needs both intend to guide a person away from the material plane and closer to the spiritual plane.<sup>51</sup>

In a later version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, an anonymous source identifies transcendence as the highest level of self-actualization. Transcendence is here defined as helping others to grow in their own self-actualization. This level, transcendence, in Maslow's hierarchy may resemble, loosely, Bonaventure's fifth wing of the *Six Winged Seraphim*<sup>52</sup> to help and love others.<sup>53</sup> The highest level of Bonaventure's structure was for the human being to love God. Of course, this could not appropriately be considered in Maslow's hierarchy since he considered man to be the highest order.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Copyright Alan Chapman 1995-2005 with acknowledgements to Maslow and [www.businessballs.com](http://www.businessballs.com)

<sup>50</sup> A.H. Maslow. *Motivation and Personality*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1954). Appendix Two

<sup>51</sup> In the model considering the six wings of the seraphim, the goal is to become closer to God, but in Maslow's hierarchy of needs man is to become a better person, with the relationship among his fellow men becoming closer, but no mention is made of becoming closer to God.

<sup>52</sup> Also referred to as the "Six Wings of the Cherubim." See note 42.

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix One concerning the fifth wing of the seraphim.

<sup>54</sup> Appendix 3. Although hierarchical thinking can be seen in many developmental theories, the reason why Maslow's hierarchy was chosen is the correlation in dates with the production of the modern sources, considered in the next chapter, beginning in the late 1930s and 1940s, when Maslow began his work in this area. Maslow also has had an impact upon American society, which will be the source for the modern perspective studied in Chapter Two.

In the present age where spirituality seems to be of great interest, it may be possible that people, specifically in the United States, deem the release from the material plane as a fulfillment of the soul. This topic will be considered in the next chapter as the research of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross may support this concept.

Although a definite correlation has not been made between the modern belief that man dies and becomes an angel and the medieval hermeneutical practice and subsequent belief about man and angels, more research into the angelology of the Middle Ages may reveal how theologians and the laity, past and present, understood and understand the relationship and identification of man as an angel during life, in death and in the eschaton.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MODERN BELIEF

The obituary in Thursday's *Daily Mining Gazette* read, "Zachary Eric Burdick, son of Brian and Kristi Burdick and brother of Ian, became 'Our Special Angel' May 3, 2005."<sup>1</sup> Without denying the grief and pain that come at the loss of a child, it is relevant for this thesis to consider the approach that contemporary society takes in calling human beings angels. As explored in the last chapter, historically it was standard to think of angels as unique ontological beings, created along with other creatures within the six days of creation. The chapter also noted that in some instances, it has been appropriate to understand the word *angel* to denote an official title or messenger for example in the case of pastors and others who had a message to give to the church.<sup>2</sup> An example of this is the case of St. Francis of Assisi. This chapter will examine some recent thoughts about angels.

As this chapter examines the modern notions about humans dying and then becoming angels, it will attempt to determine if these ideas look upon human beings as changing ontologically into angels (to be considered as separate ontological creatures,) or if the practice simply is designating the human being with the official title *angel* (assigned a vocation and function as one who delivers a message for God). To gain some

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<sup>1</sup> Zachary Eric Burdick obituary, Houghton, Michigan, *The Daily Mining Gazette*, May 5, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Brighton allows this interpretation in his commentary on Revelation. Although in his estimation, the primary understanding of angel in the book of Revelation is not an office, but truly an ontological being, used by God to proclaim his message to His People. Louis A. Brighton, *A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture: Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 61.

perspective on contemporary American thought, a brief overview of twentieth and twenty-first century written material, cinematic productions and public television will be conducted. Along with these items, the psychological research of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in the area of death and dying, prominent since the 1970s, will inform the examination and assist in determining the typical and popular perception of angels in the modern world.

In his book *Angels Among Us* Ron Rhodes comments, “There was a time when angels were relegated to mainly Christmas cards and manger scenes. . .but in recent years, angels have moved directly into the mainstream of American society.”<sup>3</sup> Journals and magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* picked up on this trend in the early 1990s, but American society’s intrigue with angels can be traced throughout the entire twentieth century. It can first be detected as early as the 1930s with the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*, and a story written and recited for a radio program for Christmas 1939 titled, “The Littlest Angel.”<sup>4</sup> The radio program later became a best-selling book in 1946. The movie continues to be a Christmas favorite, seen on various television networks every year. The notion persisted in the television programming of the 1980s. The allure with angels

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Rhodes, *Angels Among Us* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), 25.

<sup>4</sup> “*The Littlest Angel* was born in 1939 when Screen Guild producers informed scriptwriter Charles Tazewell that he must “write something.” They anticipated a crisis with a current production, and Tazewell’s creation would serve as backup. While the crisis never materialized, “THE LITTLEST ANGEL did. . . . At the time of Tazewell’s death in 1972, the Christmas story was in its thirty-eighth printing and was called an ‘international classic’ by TIME magazine. Today, THE LITTLEST ANGEL has sold nearly five million copies and is one of the all-time best-selling children’s books.” Charles Tazewell, *The Littlest Angel* Illustrated by: Paul Micich (Nashville: Ideals Children’s Books 1946). This preface to the book, *The Littlest Angel*, summarizes well the reason I used this resource for this thesis.

continues into the twenty-first century with books such as, *Johnny Angel*<sup>5</sup> and movies like *Angels in the Outfield*.<sup>6</sup>

The renewed appeal of angels in popular culture brought with it a twist in perspective different from the anagogical or allegorical understanding of angels in the Middle Ages or from downplaying angels in the period of the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> Now, angels were being incorrectly identified as dead human beings who would come back to earth and involve themselves with the matters of the earthly plane. This can be seen in the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*.<sup>8</sup> Clarence is a dead human being who has been waiting a long time to receive his angel wings. Clarence is sent to earth to help George Bailey see that his life has been important for many people around him. In the movie, we are told, "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings." At the end of the movie, Clarence has helped George out of his depression and a bell rings, signifying, the viewer hopes, that Clarence has received his wings. It may seem by this example that Clarence is ontologically a human being serving in the role of an angel, as he helped George see purpose in his life. Yet, the significance attached to the ringing of the bell lends merit to the argument that for Clarence an ontological change has at last occurred.

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<sup>5</sup> Danielle Steel, *Johnny Angel*. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> *Angels in the Outfield*, VHS, directed by William Dear (Burbank, CA:Walt Disney Pictures, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> The Age of Enlightenment chose to deny the existence of anything that would not hold up to the scientific formula. Since the existence of angels was not able to proven, they were not considered real creatures, just as miracles were not considered possible either. Therefore, angels would not have been spoken about on a regular basis in this age.

<sup>8</sup> *It's a Wonderful Life*, VHS, directed by Frank Capra (New York: NY: RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures, 1946).

A second item to consider is the 1939 radio broadcast and children's book with the same title, *The Littlest Angel*. At first glance, this children's story may not seem to speak to the topic at hand—the transformation from human to angel. It appears to be simply a cute story about how a little troublesome angel gave a gift to the newborn King, Jesus, which is used by God in such a marvelous way. Although this may be the main point at first glance, when a critical view is taken of the book it speaks directly of human beings dying and becoming angels. The second paragraph of the story identifies the boy in this way: "He was exactly four years, six months, five days, seven hours and forty-two minutes of age when he presented himself to the venerable Gatekeeper..."<sup>9</sup> and later in the book the littlest angel identifies himself by explaining, "how very difficult it is for a boy who suddenly finds himself transformed into an angel."<sup>10</sup> This story makes it clear that the author believes children, if not adults, will become angels when they die. It would be difficult to argue that the author meant the boy was merely functioning as an angel, that is, a messenger, when he uses the phrase, "transformed into an angel". Rather the book supports the understanding that human beings die and become angels—not to function as an angel, but to *be* an angel.

The NBC television series "Highway to Heaven"<sup>11</sup> also portrayed human beings dying to become angels. In this series, Michael Landon's character, Jonathan, is an angel serving God by bringing the message of God's love to people that he and Mark, (actor

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Tazewell, *The Littlest Angel Illustrated* by: Paul Micich (Nashville: Ideals Children's Books 1946). No page numbers are given in the book.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> NBC. "Highway to Heaven" September 1985 – May 1989.

Victor French's character), encounter in their journeys. Typical episodes reveal a spiritual nature about Jonathan as he appears in the dreams of other characters to convey to them the message of God's love. It is clear that Jonathan did not live a God-pleasing life on earth and he is now making up for it as an angel, in the hope that these good works will give him a second chance with God, otherwise known to Jonathan as "the boss." Unlike the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, it is not Jonathan's goal to achieve wings. But similar to the movie, it is confusing whether or not the audience of "Highway to Heaven" should consider Jonathan to be serving in the office of angel, or if one should believe that he has changed natures from being a human being into an angelic being. Yet, it cannot be denied that Jonathan is a dead human being, who has become an angel that communicates and interacts with the living.

In *Johnny Angel*,<sup>12</sup> a recent novel by popular author Danielle Steel, seventeen-year-old Johnny is killed on prom night in a car accident. After his untimely death, he becomes an angel. After a time of confusion it is revealed by an unspecified "they" that Johnny must return to earth and take care of his brother and mother who are having difficulty working through their grief. The story does not identify Johnny as having wings or having changed since his physical life on earth, but he is identified as an angel. The story ends as Johnny leaves his family to continue with his life, which is not explained in detail.

The final item examined in this chapter is the 1994 movie, *Angels in the Outfield*. This movie again reflects the popular notion of human beings dying and becoming

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<sup>12</sup> Steel.



angels, as the angel “Al” confirms the belief that angels are the spirits of people who die. As Roger, a seven-year-old boy, and Al watch the final game of the season, Al informs him that the pitcher is going to become one of them, pointing to the angels on the field. When the boy asks, “Is he going to die?” Al acknowledges it, assuring Roger that people die and become angels to help others just as the angels had done throughout the entire season of the baseball team. The angels featured in the movie are clearly portrayed as creatures quite different from human beings. They have wings, allowing them to fly almost instantly from one place to another, and have power to intervene with the physical world, e.g. changing the direction of a thrown baseball, or interfering with the laws of nature, such as stopping a baseball pitch in midair. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that this film’s understanding of *angel* would be a specific being of an angel, distinct from the being of a human. It appears to be a difference in ontology.

The materials presented in of this chapter thus far are all fiction and their story plots can be attributed to the creative imagination of their authors. It remains an open question, perhaps, whether modern entertainment in American culture understands a dead human being to become an angel in an ontological sense (according to a narrow definition of angel), or merely as one acting as a messenger (following a wider definition of angel), or whether it even acknowledges that there is a difference. A significant number of people however, have no question about what they believe. According to a *Time* magazine study in 1993, 15 percent of the population believed angels were the spirits of people who had died.<sup>13</sup> The witness of this small sampling of contemporary

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<sup>13</sup> Rhodes, 35.

books and movie themes attest that this belief has not abated, but has likely grown since 1993.<sup>14</sup>

As one considers the word *angel*, it must be acknowledged that for many this word has become interchangeable with the word *spirit*. Howard Wimer, founder of Inner Expansion Workshops, Inc., explains this matter-of-factly when he states, “Whatever you call them, they are one in the same. There are not ten million different systems in the Cosmos, there is only one. Unfortunately, there are ten million different names for the same experience or phenomena.”<sup>15</sup> Wimer also supports a connection between guardian angels and dead human beings, as he argues,

Your spiritual helpers or guides are not people you have known during your lifetime. They are souls who have learned every lesson there is to learn on planet earth and they are there to help you to get to their level of awareness. They are totally benevolent. This is what makes a “high soul.” Just because an individual is an “old soul” doesn’t mean that they have “graduated” from the earth plane. It takes someone who has mastered their experience on planet earth to help someone else really understand who they are and where they are going in life.<sup>16</sup>

Although the examination of America’s entertainment proved to be unspecific when identifying angels, American psychology and spirituality specialists, such as Wimer, have not been as ambiguous. This modern Neo-Platonic perspective views man’s body as a vehicle, which the soul uses in this world, but the true man is the eternal,

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<sup>14</sup> No recent study has been conducted since 1993. The obvious limitations of the present study do not allow such research to be done for this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Wimer, “Everyone Has a Personal Team of Angels...”  
<<http://www.innerexpansion.com>> (September 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Section titled: What is the Difference Between an Angel and a Spirit?

immortal soul. When not connected to a body, a soul would assist other souls which still remain in bodies to help them make good decisions.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, considered by some to be the world's foremost expert on the process of death and dying, felt compelled to extend her study to what happens after death. She wrote a book titled, "Life after Death" in which she contends that the body is a vehicle for the soul. She states, "The death of the human body is identical to what happens when a butterfly emerges from its cocoon . . . dying is only moving from one house into a more beautiful one. As soon as the cocoon is in an irreparable condition—be it from suicide, murder, heart attack, or chronic disease, it doesn't matter how it happened—it will release the butterfly, your soul to speak."<sup>17</sup> According to Kübler-Ross, the loss of the body is a good thing, allowing the soul to be free from that which decays. She describes the soul's existence outside of the body after death as having basic abilities such as hearing and seeing. The dead are said to know thoughts of other people in the room with them when they die, and to see specific actions of medical personnel or family members. The dead person in this stage of death, according to Kübler-Ross, may transcend time and space and appear to a loved one across the ocean in another country.<sup>18</sup> Although Kübler-Ross does not explicitly define this existence as angelic, it certainly coheres with the understanding promoted by Wimer and others as to what angels and souls are capable of doing. This was detailed in the four examples from the entertainment industry at the beginning of this chapter.

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *Life after Death* (Berkeley: Celestialarts, 1991), 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

As evidenced in this chapter, popular culture's definition of *angel* is not consistent. Most people do not take the time to carefully explain what they mean when using the term.<sup>19</sup> As Howard Wimer states when defining 'the high soul,' "If a person comes from a more traditional or religious belief system, he or she will usually refer to this divine inspiration as angels."<sup>20</sup> It doesn't seem to matter that this use of angel does not fit the traditional orthodox definition of angel as a separate ontological being created by God within the six days of creation.

This elusiveness causes a problem today in distinguishing the identity of an angel from that of a human being. Unlike the Middle Ages, when wings differentiated between human beings and angels in paintings and sculpture,<sup>21</sup> today, babies are pictured with wings and called cherubs, confusing the identities still more. Yet, this confusion goes beyond merely a picture or representation as it erroneously amalgamates the characteristics of both beings. Angelic characteristics are attributed inappropriately to human beings and human characteristics are reprehensibly given to angels. Examples of this latter confusion are apparent in CBS's "Touched by an Angel"<sup>22</sup> and the movie *Michael*.<sup>23</sup> In both instances angels are portrayed as acting as sinful human beings do.

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* questions 50 – 61 specifically addressed the classification of angel. It would be good if this were the case today, but it is not, and therefore it cannot readily be determined what people truly mean when they use the word.

<sup>20</sup> Wimer.

<sup>21</sup> Mentioned above on page 12 fn 16.

<sup>22</sup> CBS, "Touched by an Angel," 1990-1998.

<sup>23</sup> Nora Ephron, Director, *Michael*, 1996.

Michael, the angel, is addicted to cigarettes and carousing<sup>24</sup> and in various episodes of CBS's "Touched by an Angel", Monica disagreed with God and proceeded to do her will in disobedience.<sup>25</sup> NBC's "Highway to Heaven" depicts a man with the abilities of an angel, telling God's message, and having power to protect people from dangerous events.<sup>26</sup>

Many stories have been published about men and women encountering 'angels' who helped them through a tough time. Typically, once the 'angel' is described, another person is able to identify that angel as a human being who had died years before. Examples of this have been seen on PAX's "It's a Miracle" and also on daytime television.<sup>27</sup> It may seem that the story merely makes for good television, but what would pass for more reliable sources have been printed in books such as Billy Graham's *Angels: God's Secret Agents*, and also in a Guidepost Book, *All Night, All Day Angels Watching over Me*.<sup>28</sup> The Guidepost accounts are taken from ordinary "men and women who have been granted a glimpse of these special envoys from heaven."<sup>29</sup> Although most accounts in the book speak of angels as separate created beings, one specific account

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Touched by an Angel."

<sup>26</sup> "Highway to Heaven."

<sup>27</sup> PAX, "It's a Miracle" 1995 – 2001. CBS, "Guiding Light," 2005. At the death of an adult character, Philip Spaulding his ex-wife and children testified he became an angel and now watches over his family from 'above.' CBS, "The Young and the Restless," 2005. At the death of a teenage character, Cassy Newman her parents and friends talk with her image about how they should go on with their lives after her death. Cassy is visible to only certain people, with a glow to her image, and appears in both the home in which she lived as well as in a coffee shop where she and her friends spent a lot of time.

<sup>28</sup> Billy Graham, *Angels: God's Secret Agents* reprint paperback (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995). Evelyn Bence, *All Night, All Day Angels Watching Over Me* (Carmel: Guideposts, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Evelyn Bence, *All Night, All Day Angels Watching Over Me*, preface vii.

strangely alters from this pattern in the record of a mother, Pat Egan Dexter, who was in the hospital with her young son. While sitting in the waiting room she experienced the warm and tender care of Sister Mary Margaret as she was encouraged to trust her son would not die. After Pat's son recovered, she called the hospital to thank Sister Mary Margaret. Pat recounts, "After telling the supervisor what had happened there was an odd silence on the other end of the line, neither confirming nor denying the Sister's presence. Then the supervisor said, 'We used to have a nun with that name...But she died ten years ago.' With (Pat's) protests about the event being more recent than ten years ago the supervisor responded, 'I'm glad you told me your story. It's good to hear that Mary Marg is still helping out.'"<sup>30</sup> With bizarre statements like this one, an incorrect understanding of the afterlife is instilled with the delusional perception that dead people are actively involved in the daily lives of living people. These misguided statements make it possible to consider the reality of an afterlife without ever having to give thought to the existence of God. And even if God is discussed in the pain of death, Gerhard Forde's assessment, "Identification of suffering with evil has the further result that God must be absolved from all blame," is realized.<sup>31</sup> This can be observed in the movie *Steel Magnolias*. In the story, the death of Shelby, a young and vibrant mother, is seen as the worst evil. Instead of recognizing death as the tyrannical horror that it is, the religious

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>31</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 82-85. As Forde states in footnote 14, "Perhaps it is as Hannah Arendt remarks, 'When men could no longer *praise*, they turned their greatest conceptual efforts to *justifying* God and His Creation in theodicies.'" (Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 2, *Willing* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977], 97.

character, Annelle, creates a theodicy to justify God's action in Shelby's death, by telling Shelby's mother and friends that God took her so she would be able to do everything she wanted to do for her son that her body would not allow her to do.<sup>32</sup>

Announcements and poems written at the time of a person's death often allude to the deceased's new existence as an angel.<sup>33</sup> Well-meaning people, trying to comfort the grieving, convey a message that the dead are still concerned about the lives of the living by inaccurately saying, "Your loved one will now be watching over you."<sup>34</sup> At best these words may be something to say to fill the uncomfortable silence that seems unbearable when sitting with someone in the pains of grief. At their worst these words hinder, if not prohibit, the proclamation of the true comfort Christ has for the grieving by pointing the grieving back to the helpless dead person and ultimately impeding the healing process. Some poems actually deny that death exists. One anonymous person wrote on a memorial page of a dead loved one, "As I watched the sunset tonight it was so beautiful, I know you made it just for me."<sup>35</sup> Songs such as "Holes in the Floor of Heaven"<sup>36</sup> and

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<sup>32</sup> *Steel Magnolias*, 1989. Annelle, being a theologian of glory, as Luther would call her according to the Heidelberg Disputation 1518, does not want to acknowledge death as being bad, and most of all she does not want God to look bad. So she creates a reason why God has chosen to take Shelby's life. (a theodicy) The excuse she creates justifies God's reason for doing something that seems so awful. Instead of being a theologian of the cross and calling a thing what it is (death is bad), Annelle wants to make death good thinking the excuse will be better than the truth. Gerhard Forde writes it as such, "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is... We are inveterate theologians of glory" Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 82 – 83.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 3.

<sup>34</sup> Personal reference from cards when my father died in 1998 as well as personal conversations which have taken place with those who have lost loved ones.

<sup>35</sup> <<http://www.pasty.com>> is a website with pictures from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The last day of every month is the memorial picture and postings. People write notes about family and friends who have passed away. In 2004, a note written on the November memorial page had this quote.

“Help Pour Out the Rain”<sup>37</sup> also give this misguided perception that man dies and becomes an angel. In the song “Help Pour Out the Rain,” a father is perplexed when his young daughter asks, “When I die, can I help God pour out the rain?”<sup>38</sup> What makes this song confusing is that the little girl also asks if she will be able to see Jesus. A mixture of Christian faith and heresy come together in this song to confuse what Scripture says happens when man dies, with what society would like to believe happens when man dies.

Howard Wimer claims to educate people to be able to communicate with their personal angels, whom he considers to be high-souls or dead people who have mastered earth’s plane.<sup>39</sup> People commonly report experiences, such as that of Pat Egan Dexter, of having been comforted by an angel who later turns out to be identified as a person who has died years before. A self-proclaimed “American Catholic” named Shay also claims he can teach people how to communicate with their personal angel, and yet Shay and Wimer would disagree on the definition of the angel.<sup>40</sup> Shay claims that a person’s angel could be a friend or a family member who lived together during the same time, possibly in a past life, as those they help. Shay believes his own angel is a buddy of his

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<sup>36</sup> Steve Wariner, “Holes in the Floor of Heaven,” *Burnin’ the Roadhouse Down*, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Buddy Jewel, “Help Pour out the Rain” (Lacey’s Song), *Buddy Jewell*, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Wimer. Although he considers ‘high souls’ to be dead people, he does argue that they are not the souls of people who have recently died. Therefore, a person’s grandmother is unable to be her grandchild’s personal angel. These ‘high souls’ have been dead a long time and have possibly lived many lives to gain the status of being a ‘high soul.’

<sup>40</sup> <<http://www.angelicadvice.com>> Last accessed September 2004.



who died in World War I.<sup>41</sup> Poems testify that people believe their loved ones to be in the rain or in the wind after they have died. Entertainment in various forms confirms the idea that human beings die and become angels, or portray angels with human traits. With all these points of reinforcement, it is not surprising that people may begin to believe that man truly does die and become an angel.

Is there a risk in believing what is taught about dead human beings on TV or on the big screen? Is it dangerous to accept what is read in books or heard on the radio about angels and their identity? Believing that man dies and becomes an angel seems to bring comfort to those who hold on to the belief. Too often, anything perceived as bringing comfort to the grieving is considered good. But, one must ask himself if the result is indeed good, or if the result of believing that man dies and becomes an angel is actually the denigration and eclipse of the central point of faith—Christ.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. It is not clear if Shay is speaking of a past life for his soul, or if his buddy died while they were serving together in WWI and came back to help him through the rest of Shay's life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DANGERS

The popular ideas presented in chapter two may sound too unbelievable for a Christian to accept as true. However, when a person is consistently exposed to this thought through various media, even the Christian may begin to accept the validity of the concept that man will become an angel when he dies. Since the Fall, human beings are inclined to want an existence better than what they have been given. Robert Kolb states, “Because God is spirit (John 4:24) and thus unseen, and because our bodies do fail us in their mortality, we (Christians) tend inevitably to think less of our bodies, particularly when they become uncomfortable.”<sup>1</sup> Christians confess the promise of the resurrection of the body in the Apostle’s Creed. Yet, when given what is seen as a more spiritual or seemingly improved explanation for life after death, such as a man spending eternity as an angel, man will too frequently forfeit the promise of God to resurrect the body in exchange for a lie.

Jeffrey Gibbs has identified the lie as a misplaced focus on the ‘interim state’.<sup>2</sup>

He states, “A very minor Biblical theme, which really belongs on the sidelines, has

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb. *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Gibbs uses the term ‘interim state’ to describe the existence of the soul after the death of the body. Jeffrey Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia” *Concordia Journal* (October 2001): 310-322. Dr. Louis Brighton in his article “The Three Modes of Eternal Life” in the same edition of the *Concordia Journal* pages 298-309 considers the separation of the body and soul as the second mode of eternal life. It is understood that these two descriptions refer to the same period in a believer’s life. Although either could be used, to maintain consistency this thesis will use the term defined by Gibbs, ‘interim state’.

supplanted true Biblical hope and become the functional center for many if not virtually all of our people....Somehow we have allowed this minor Biblical emphasis to become our hope and our longing to the exclusion of the Parousia of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> This is evident at funerals as the expectation of Christ’s return is unmentioned and the victory over the grave prematurely celebrated.<sup>4</sup>

It may seem, then, that believing that dead human beings become angels is only dangerous to the belief in the resurrection of the body. If this were true, correction could simply take place when a Pastor is preaching or comforting someone at the graveside or funeral home. But Luther states clearly in his commentary regarding 1 Corinthians 15, “For where this article (the resurrection of the dead) is surrendered, all others are gone too; and the chief article and the entire Christ are lost or preached entirely in vain.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this belief has far-reaching consequences within the life lived on this side of the grave, consequences that need to be addressed. The belief that men die and become angels has the potential to kill faith as it unravels the foundation on which faith is built—

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 311; idem “Regaining Biblical Hope.”

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Gibbs, “Five Things You Should *Not* Say at Funerals” *Concordia Journal* (October 2003): 363-367.

<sup>5</sup> Luther Works. *1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1 Timothy* Hilton Volume 28. Oswald Editor (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 60. Gustaf Wingren shows how the *corpus doctrinae* is effected as he examines the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead from the doctrine of creation skillfully recounting Irenaeus’ argument against the Gnostic denial of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in his book *Creation and Law*. Wingren states, “But it was characteristics that the problem of the participation of the body in the life which is received in the Resurrection was not restricted by Irenaeus to its future participation in that life, but is extended to include the whole life of the body. All life is created, and is thus bestowed by the Creator.” And again he argues “Against this (the disappearance of belief in Creation) we must stress, first, that the Christian faith is faith in Creation; second, that we alter most of the other aspects of the content of faith if we begin by denying Creation; and finally that our theological method ought to be developed in such a way that Creation remains the starting-point of our discussion.” Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1961), 18 and 25 respectively.

Christ. Although Christ is not the direct target of the attack, the belief makes subtle attacks upon the confession of faith surrounding God's plan of salvation with the ultimate result being the crumbling of the person of Christ, and the entire Christian faith.<sup>6</sup>

Martin Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostle's Creed, makes it clear that when one states, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," she is confessing that God has created *all* that is in the world, including physical matter.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, physical life in the body is important to the Creator. Kübler-Ross and others such as the Gnostics and earlier Plato determined that the body is simply a vehicle or a shell that is to be used in this life and not a necessary component for a human being. The personality and everything needed for personhood is commonly understood to be found within the soul.<sup>8</sup> As chapter 3 tried to demonstrate, the belief that one dies and becomes an angel finds its foundation in the same philosophic principles. The danger manifests itself when man denies the essence of his human nature as body and soul.

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<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *Creation and Fall*, speaks about this in the chapter titled "the Religious Question", as the serpent does not make a full frontal attack when seeking to deceive the woman, but rather the serpent subtly maneuvers Eve to want something more spiritual convincing her that she is lacking something. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 70 – 79. The same holds here, as people conclude that a human being becoming an angel results in a more spiritual existence and thus better than life existence in the physical body.

<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 2003 Dr. Charles Arand taught in a lecture in Lutheran Confessions II at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis that there is significance in Luther's use of the word "all" throughout the entire explanation to the First Article. It is comprehensive and does not allow any part of creation to fall outside of God's design.

<sup>8</sup> The dictionary defines the soul as, "An entity which is regarded as being the immortal or spiritual part of the person and though having no physical or material part of the person is credited with the functions of thinking and willing and hence determining all behavior and the spirit of a dead person, thought of as separate from the body and leading an existence of its own."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer held both body and soul to be integral parts of a human whole. According to him, “Adam’s body belongs to his essential being. Man’s body is not his prison, his shell his exterior, but man himself. Man does not ‘have’ a body; he is his body, as Christ is completely his body, as the church is the body of Christ. The man who renounces his body renounces his existence before the Creator.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Charles Arand in his book *That I May Be His Own* articulates the interdependence Luther saw between the chief parts of the catechism. He writes, “Luther interprets the Ten Commandments as part of God’s creation within the context of natural Law. They are, so to say, built into the very structure or woven into the fabric of creation itself.”<sup>10</sup> So, not only is the Decalogue interpreted in light of the First Article, but Luther also deals with the First Article as a basis for the Ten Commandments.<sup>11</sup> Man’s denial of how God made him, judges God inept as the Creator and perverts the entire order established by God in Creation.

Another perversion takes place in reference to the second commandment. Luther’s explanation of the second commandment asserts: “We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.”<sup>12</sup> But if one insists that the dead become angels, the trust, the profession of dependence and the praise that should be laid at the

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<sup>9</sup> Bonhoeffer, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Charles P. Arand, *That I May be His Own* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 136-137.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>12</sup> “Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism” in *Lutheran Worship Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), 300.

throne of God is given instead to men. The dead human is praised for providing safety, or controlling specific acts or events in a living person's life, and God is removed from daily involvement with His creation. One such example of this is the account of Pam and her son PJ. PJ died at six months, a victim of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Pam believed that at his death PJ became the family's personal angel – there to watch over them and take care of them. A year after PJ's death, Pam became pregnant and although she and her husband planned every possible way for the baby to be born on a different day, the new daughter was born on PJ's birthday. Pam wrote on a website dedicated to the memory of SIDS victims, "I know that PJ had another idea in mind and he caused his sister to be born on his birthday. I am glad that he watches over our family."<sup>13</sup> Instead of calling upon God's name in her time of trouble, Pam put her trust in the abilities of her dead son. And, rather than praising God for the birth of a healthy baby girl at the right time, she praised her dead son for knowing better than her husband or herself when the time was right for the birth of the new child.

A second perversion of God's established order can be identified in the respect or lack of respect given to physical life. The human body is hopelessly vulnerable when man considers only the soul to be the essential component of the human being. This view can be associated with a belief in past lives and reincarnation. According to this belief, a soul waits for a body available to inhabit, then lives in it until the body wears out and dies. An example of this thinking was evident as a young couple, anxiously awaiting the

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<sup>13</sup> "The Smallest Angel Memorial Wall" <<http://www.geocities.com/smallestangels>> (2005). Story related on this website for families suffering the loss of a child to SIDS.

birth of a baby girl, suddenly miscarried at 32 weeks. As the couple grieved the loss of their daughter the woman's mother comforted her by saying, "It is okay, she is an angel and when the time is right she will return to you. Then you will have a healthy baby girl."<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to comfort her daughter, the woman essentially denied the importance of the body and in so doing denied the death of her granddaughter. While seeming to be a comforting statement, the human being is reduced to a soul with no need for a body.

Martin Luther eloquently conveys God's respect and value for the physical body of the human being when he gives his explanation to the fifth commandment, "You shall not murder." He writes, "We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."<sup>15</sup> It is clear that Luther believes that in order to fear and love God we must honor the body, which would certainly not include killing it in order to allow the soul to live. It is difficult to justify Luther's admonition if one is led to believe that the soul is greater than the body—a mere vessel.

Howard Wimer, founder of Inner Expansion: Workshops for the Soul "How to Contact your Angel," states that the soul is not simultaneously created at conception with the body, but rather joins the body much closer to birth, if not during the birth process. Therefore, he states, "The moral dilemma of the Christian church concerning abortion is not even a consideration because the soul will find another 'avenue' or wait until another

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<sup>14</sup> Personal testimony, April 2004. Used with permission.

<sup>15</sup> "Luther's Small Catechism," 300.

time to accomplish its purpose.”<sup>16</sup> Both the grandmother’s comforting message and Howard Wimer’s belief focus on the value of the soul while viewing the body as a secondary, non-essential part of the human being, in violation of Scriptural anthropology and in full disregard of the command of God to value the body He created!

Scripture can be misinterpreted to support this concept of the soul’s superiority over theology. For example, Colossians 3:2 states “Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things....Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature....because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” Or Jesus’ words recorded in John 6:63, may also be twisted to give credence to this concept, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to your are spirit and are life;” thus Paul acknowledges that it is not flesh and blood that will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> Hence, one could conclude that it does not matter if the body is left behind when a person dies or is never born into one; in either case, considering euthanasia and abortion respectively, the body is non-essential for the human soul. The spiritual state of life is seen as the only necessary nature of the human being.

To aid the confusion, a Christian believes that when a person dies she is with the Lord. No one can argue with this; for even Christ promises the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” And Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “it is better to be away from the body and with the Lord.” Yet, although this is true, and it rightly provides comfort for those who mourn the death of a loved one, it does not mean that God prefers

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<sup>16</sup> <<http://www.innerexpansion.com/private-consultation.htm>> (2005). In this belief, the soul is considered to be pure and without sin.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:6.



his children to be dead rather than alive.<sup>18</sup> For although it is proper to say that it is better to be away from the body and with the Lord, it is not correct to say that when one is in the body she is away from the Lord and needs to escape the body to be with the Lord.<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Gibbs writes, “Even our hymnody has been infected with this confusion...they (hymns) speak purely in vertical terms, as if the ...goal is to make it through our earthly lives, and get ‘up’ to our true home (heaven). An example of a hymn that does this is: ‘I’m but a Stranger Here, Heaven is my Home’.”<sup>20</sup>

When heaven is considered the human being’s true home, and the soul seen as the essential part of the human nature, the natural order of gender, marriage and family also becomes confused. The third perversion that may be seen in the natural order concerns the sixth commandment.

Genesis 1:27 describes, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” And again in Genesis 2:23-24 Adam agrees declaring at the creation of Eve, “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of

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<sup>18</sup> The account of Jesus at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, John 11, is a graphic scene of how God, the Creator of man, both body and soul, grieves at the tearing apart of Lazarus’ soul and body. Although Lazarus was a believer and was with the Lord, just like the thief on the cross, he was not whole because his body and soul were separated. Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, 10. The explanation to the fifth commandment states that while we are living on this earth we are to help and support our neighbor in all his needs. If a person is dead, she is unable to serve her neighbor as God commands.

<sup>19</sup> David testifies to the Lord’s omnipresence in the life of His children in Psalm 139:7-10 as he confesses, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.”

<sup>20</sup> Gibbs, “Regaining the Biblical Hope,” 312. Danger lurks just around the corner, because if heaven is truly man’s home, man does not have to work here on earth, including service to his neighbor—and can live his life on hold, waiting for the day the Lord takes him Home. This is incongruent with Scripture and the Law.

my flesh....For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and they will become one flesh.”

The confusion is also observed, even in children, as an eleven-year-old boy sits in a chair on stage as his parents and a psychologist discuss the dilemma: The boy feels that he is truly a girl in a boy’s body and wants to dress and act like a girl, which he thinks matches how he feels. The parents are seeking assistance to know what is right. They are unsure how they are to treat their son, who wants to be their daughter.<sup>21</sup> If the answer given is to treat him how he feels, i.e. like a girl and allow him to wear dresses and play with dolls, the next logical question could possibly be, “when is the correct time to have a sex change performed and make the child or adult sterile?”

When the body is secondary, it no longer determines how one is to be treated and, human reason and feelings become the authority. A man is who he decides he is, rather than what his body is. Human beings are no longer created male and female to multiply and fill the earth as Scripture claims in Genesis 1 and 2. There are so many ways to have children in today’s world that filling the earth is not dependent upon a man and a woman coming together. Instead, when a man and woman come together and a child is created unintentionally it seems as if it is a shock to the couple that this outcome was a reasonable possibility. Sexuality becomes a selfish pleasure in which humanity indulges with little or no consideration of what God’s design intended.

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<sup>21</sup> Oprah Winfrey. “Oprah: The 11-Year Old Who Wants a Sex Change.” August 24, 2004. Because the child is still growing and developing a sex change was not advised, but it was not ruled out at a later date. The parents were encouraged to treat the child according to what he wanted so that he could develop his identity as either boy or girl.

If one follows the logic of Howard Wimer, a particular sex of a body which a soul inhabits does not matter. This validates homosexuality as an acceptable choice since the soul alone, without the body, determines desire. The term, 'soul mates', which has been adopted by many popular dating services, takes on a new meaning when one considers that a woman's soul mate may be another woman. The belief in 'soul-mates' considers the love between two people, homosexual or heterosexual, as non-material as it tries to redefine real love as spiritual, consisting only of feelings from within the human soul.<sup>22</sup> This poses many problems for the church since Scripture paints another picture of marriage relationships as between a man and woman, husband and wife, relating to one another not only in inward and spiritual ways but also in physical and material ways. It is within this holistic intimacy of a man and woman, in marriage, that God's design has placed the conception of a child. In Genesis 2:23-24 it is clear that God created woman specifically for man, not for another woman: "The Lord fashioned into a woman the rib, which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." The spiritual existence which the

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<sup>22</sup> When people believe that they are to be married to their soul mates it makes marriage difficult when struggles occur in the daily life of a couple. It becomes easy to use this misunderstood concept to support the idea that if everyone married his or her soul mate there would be no struggles and difficulties in their lives. The struggles ultimately lead to a decision that they have not in fact married their soul mates and that the difficult marriage should be dissolved so both parties can be free to look for their 'true soul mates'.

angels experience does not have this blessing. Angels neither marry nor procreate.<sup>23</sup>

Only human beings are commanded to come together and create children.

To believe that man's true and only nature is spiritual causes the perversion of God's design in creation as presented above. Yet the dangers do not end with these perversions. Another danger that has arisen is unveiled as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross writes,

The work with death and dying was simply a testing ground for me, to see if I can take hardship, abuse, and resistance... But my *real* job is to tell people that death does not exist... You have to know not to be afraid. Only if you keep a very, very open channel, an open mind and no fear, will great insight and revelations come to you... Get in touch with your own inner self and learn not to be afraid. Get rid of all your negativity and begin to view life as a challenge, a testing ground of your own inner resources and strength. God is not a punitive, nasty God.<sup>24</sup>

Christians face this danger, denying the reality of death, when choosing poems for obituary cards and when planning a funeral service for a loved one.<sup>25</sup> Passages in Scripture speak of Christ's victory over death,<sup>26</sup> death losing its sting,<sup>27</sup> and referring to the dead as being asleep.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the syntax of Kübler-Ross' language that death does not exist can resonate as truth within the Christian's understanding and might even

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<sup>23</sup> Mark 12:25 records Jesus' answer to the Sadducees' about the eternal life of a woman who has married many times. A comparison is made between the future of the elect and the angels, asserting that angels do not marry nor are they given in marriage. "For (all those who have died) they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Life After Death*, 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 4, poems IV and V from Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 15:54, Isaiah 25:8-11.

<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 15:55, Hosea 13:14.

<sup>28</sup> John 11:11 and many other passages that speak of the 'faithful' as asleep, rather than dead. The term dead is used solely for those who die in unbelief.

be accepted as Truth. Jesus' weeping at the tomb of Lazarus is no longer recognized as grief over the death of a beloved friend or the Creator grieving over the wages of sin upon His beloved creation. Rather, Jesus is perceived to be grieving over having to recall Lazarus from the afterlife of Paradise to continue his bodily life on earth away from God. A misunderstanding concerning the eternal life of human beings clearly shows itself here as one identifies the beginning of eternal life with the moment when a man's soul is torn from his body.<sup>29</sup> This perception supports the incorrect thought that the body should be treated as a shell, which is forced upon the soul. Rather, Scripture's description is much different than this. Scripture describes eternal life beginning with the onset of faith in a person—at Baptism or at the hearing of the Word of God. A new stage in this same eternal life happens when the body and soul are torn apart in mortal death, and the final stage of the same eternal life will be realized on the last day when Christ returns and the body and soul will be reunited in perfection.

Another danger that may be possible with this skewed perception of the body as a shell is to see suicide as an acceptable means of shedding a shell which is confining or deteriorating.<sup>30</sup> The Christian may even be comforted by this distorted thought to think that Jesus would welcome the death of the body rather than rejoice in its creation. Again Kübler-Ross' syntax resonates with the Christian, death is not something to be afraid of, instead it is even reasonable to desire it.

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<sup>29</sup> Jeff Gibbs, "The Five Things *Not* to Say at a Funeral" and Louis Brighton "The Three Modes of Eternal Life" *Concordia Journal* (October 2001): 298-311.

<sup>30</sup> Euthanasia is also a means to do this. Webster's Dictionary Third Edition defines euthanasia as the "act or practice of causing death painlessly, so as to end suffering; advocated by some as a way to deal with persons dying of incurable, painful diseases."

The Christian does not have a fear of death because of her trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet Kübler-Ross is not encouraging believers to trust in the Lord, rather she encourages people to trust in themselves. She argues all people, no matter what they believe, experience peace after they die. She testifies from her own experience that the dead can come back and communicate with the living and therefore are not really dead.<sup>31</sup>

Although Kübler-Ross' perception that death does not exist can pose dangers for the Christian, it is plausible that even graver danger is presented to the Christian as Kübler-Ross dissolves the reason for death—sin. Scripture and the Symbols of the Lutheran church state that death is God's punishment for sin. When death no longer exists, God is reduced to being, at best, an observer of His creation. Sin ceases to be a problem and man becomes the ultimate authority.<sup>32</sup> Kübler-Ross says it plainly as she explains the afterlife, "You will be given an opportunity – not to be judged by a judgmental God – but to judge yourself, by having to review every single action, every word and every thought of your life. You make your own hell or your own heaven by the way you have lived."<sup>33</sup> The judgment of God is replaced with man's ability to judge himself. Although at first this may sound comforting, in the end it becomes daunting. The comfort is finally ripped away when the man's conscience becomes too loud to

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<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' account of her encounter with a woman who had died ten months previously. Kübler-Ross, 33-35.

<sup>32</sup> Gustaf Wingren writes in his book *Creation and Law*, "If we allow death to lose its character of judgment and become "a friend," we are idealizing man; and the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane – His shrinking from the "cup" – becomes incomprehensible. Death is hell, and does not cease to be hell, and all the evil things that the Bible says about death, the enemy, remain true." Wingren, 76-77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 37.

ignore and he realizes he remains in his sin. Since he has determined himself to be the authority, a Savior is not necessary. Christ is reduced to a human being who lived a perfect life. Instead of bringing comfort, he shows the woman how to live so that she will live in heaven and not hell.

When God is reduced to an observer and Christ is reduced to only a good human model to follow, man is truly living in Hell. The freedom to live, received in the message of the Gospel, is abdicated and replaced with the burden to live a good life no matter how difficult that may be. Repentance is not an option; it is not relevant. The faults one accumulates over a lifetime will remain and determine one's eternal experience. Therefore, the man's life had better look good. Hence, time is spent living as well as possible, but with the definite fear of spending eternal life in hell, because a person cannot remain without error.

What began as a seemingly reasonable and appealing message that human beings die and become angels, in the end becomes a torment of a sure hell from which there is no escape. By the time man comes to understand the consequences of his actions, he has made it through childhood and adulthood with their horrible acts and he will live in despair knowing that in the end all he has is hell.<sup>34</sup>

Although a Christian may tend to think less of her body, particularly when it fails and causes suffering, there is danger in denying the body as an essential part of a human being. It is not safe to believe the soul is the one and only essence of a human being that

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<sup>34</sup> If one considers the idea of an age of accountability to be truth it would fit nicely into this schemata. It would provide relief for the person who was judging himself and seeing the horrible behavior of his childhood consequently removing it as a viable reason for punishment in his eternal life.

is set free to become an angel when the body dies. In doing so, she denies the physical-spiritual creature God created her to be, and because she denies it everything centers in her rather than in God. When this happens, as this chapter has attempted to show, the ultimate comfort of a totally spiritual existence collapses on itself and becomes the ultimate despair.<sup>35</sup>

At first, the belief that man dies and becomes an angel would not seem to qualify as idolatry, yet the final result of this belief replicates the original sin, removing God, the Creator, as God, and placing man, a creature, in His place. This is the ultimate idolatry. Modern popular culture and entertainment have grabbed it with two fists, and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has provided the “research”<sup>36</sup> to support it. Yet, in the end, if one believes man will die and become an angel, a spirit, he will be led into the ultimate despair, leaving him in grave condition.

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<sup>35</sup> Gustaf Wingren writes, “When the existential interpretation centres everything upon man the hearer, does it not lose its character of Law and Gospel? Can my death contain the Last Judgment, if there is to be no Last Judgment after my death? Can my faith contain eternal life, if eternal life does not exist outside my faith? The power with which judgment works in me depends on the fact that it is a reality outside me, and similarly the power with which the Gospel works in me rests on events which have taken place outside of me.” Wingren, 78.

<sup>36</sup> Although Kübler-Ross considered her work in this area to be research, it is debatable whether the scientific community would deem it to be such. Most of her ‘research’ in this area was based on her own personal experiences, of which only she can testify to their validity, and witnessed conversations with people prior to, not after, death.



## Chapter Four

### Support for the Resurrection of the Body

It cannot be denied that people living in the twenty-first century are bombarded with a myriad of different and sometimes conflicting views of what happens when a person dies. Although the church may foolishly think it is the only source which informs its people about life after death, it was the intention of this thesis' second chapter to document some of the other sources which may also advise them. A, perhaps, all-too-typical scenario follows to show how some of these sources might impact a person's life and in turn shroud certain faith in God's promise to resurrect the body.<sup>1</sup>

A mother greets family and friends in the front of the church near the small white casket which holds her four-year-old son. As a close family friend gives her a hug, he says, "God takes the angels to be with Him."<sup>2</sup> As the visitation continues, family and friends reminisce, share stories, shed tears and laugh. Another friend approaches and explains; "Now you have a guardian angel watching over you from heaven."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the service this mother tries to focus on the words the Pastor is speaking, but her mind

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<sup>1</sup> This scenario is used to show how the various views discussed in the thesis' second chapter can bombard a person. Since children are usually considered as angels more often than adults the scenario considers the death of a child. Even though the scenario is fictitious the information about the funeral service, the 'theme' and the hymns are suggestions from Pastor Howard Neider, given during a phone interview on November 14, 2005. He stated that he has either used or would encourage families to use such material for the funeral of an infant or a child. The thoughts of the mother during the funeral service are similar to those which my grandmother expressed she had at the funeral of her daughter (conversations in 1995 - 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Theresa Huntley. *When Your Child Loses a Loved One: Hope and Healing Series* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001). 25-26. Although this reference specifically discusses a psychological danger when a child overhears that their sibling or another child has been taken by God to become an angel, the reference validates, once again, that people are comforting each other with the hope that when someone dies, that person becomes an angel.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

wanders to things that will never be: his first day of school, his first test, his first girlfriend, his high school graduation, and the list goes on without ceasing, tears flooding her heart and her eyes, the Pastor's sermon and the hymns are lost in the swell of emotions.

A month passes and she begins to wonder, "Is there life after death? What is my son doing now?" The words of her friends come back to her, and she thinks about her son watching over her. And then she is reminded of the book she read to her son the previous Christmas about the little boy who died and became an angel and had so much difficulty becoming a 'good' angel.<sup>4</sup> "Would that be my son?" she asks herself. She dries her tears and focuses on something less depressing, but later she finds the funeral bulletin and studies it. "A Home Going Service," she reads. Curious about what is meant by 'home going' she looks at the hymns, "Children of the Heavenly Father," "Have No Fear Little Flock," and "Amazing Grace." The tears return with a vengeance and she stops reading, but the wondering continues. The hymn titles speak little about what kind of home her son lives in now; and since nothing else is written in the bulletin, she still does not understand what is meant by "home going service". She remembers the pastor's visit but it all seems a blur. She opens her Bible and reads her favorite passage, but it doesn't speak to the questions she has.

A week later when she's in the bookstore she notices a book titled, *Life after Death*.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the author, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, as someone who has researched the topic of death and dying, she reads a little of the first page. Surfing through the book she comes to a page where death is associated with birth as a "normal and all human process".<sup>6</sup> Kübler-Ross

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Townsend.

<sup>5</sup> Kübler-Ross, *Life After Death*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

continues, “Dying is only moving from one house into a more beautiful one,” and she makes the comparison between the caterpillar leaving its cocoon and becoming a butterfly.<sup>7</sup> This resonates with the church teaching she remembers when her Sunday school teacher said that the butterfly is a picture of eternal life. Not really understanding what was truly meant by that symbolism, she now applies the knowledge she has and determines that the church supports the idea that people become free from their body, just as Kübler-Ross states in her book. And since all of the information speaks about a new beautiful ‘house’ or ‘life,’ she determines that eternal life must be void of the human body, and a new body, maybe an angelic body, is given in eternal life. She still misses her son, but feels at peace that she knows more about eternal life. She just hopes he does not have as much difficulty becoming a good angel as the little boy in the book *The Littlest Angel* had.

The first chapter of this thesis looked at the possible history of the belief that human beings can become or are angels, the second chapter looked at some contemporary thought, and the third chapter addressed some dangers this thought could create. This final chapter will consider how the church teaches, preaches and conveys the truth about eternal life through its funeral rites, Bible studies, pericopes, and hymns.

It would be reassuring if the above scenario could say that the Pastor’s funeral sermon spoke directly to the hope the family has because of the boy’s baptism into Christ and the promise of the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns. But such comfort is not always articulated in even Lutheran funeral services. As Jeffrey Gibbs contends, “I still hear at funerals things said about the dead Christian that are not true. The problem is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

that I hear them said by the pastor, as part of his sermon... These are things which, *theologically speaking*, are not true”.<sup>8</sup> While Gibbs’s article does not specifically address the thought that people die and become angels, four of the five things he does address concern the same dangerous thinking—that eternal life is a bodiless existence. What causes pastors to speak such untruths? Gibbs states, “My real guess would be that such misspeaking at funerals occurs because we have lost a real appreciation for the true and great Biblical hope of the parousia of Jesus at the consummation of the age.”<sup>9</sup> He continues, “When the second coming plays no *functional* role in one’s working theology, it will not show up in funeral sermons.”<sup>10</sup> If it does not show up in funeral sermons, which are perhaps the most obvious and acceptable place for this hope to be preached, it probably will not show up in weekly preaching. And if it does not appear in the pastor’s sermons, it will be difficult for the church’s membership to have a working understanding of the second coming and the resurrection of the body.

Luther addresses this concern as he elucidates 1 Corinthians 15. He states, “Therefore, St. Paul introduces his remarks with these words: ‘Now I would remind you, etc.’ as if to say: ‘I perceive clearly that it will be necessary always to admonish you to be mindful of what I preached to you, *lest you lose sight of it or let it be supplanted in your heart by a different message and doctrine.*’ *For wherever this is not constantly pursued and recalled*, and where the heart does not occupy itself with it, *there doors and*

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Gibbs. “*Five Things You Should Not Say at Funerals*,” 363. (emphasis his)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*windows stand wide ajar for all sorts of seduction to enter and for the extinction and removal of pure doctrine.*”<sup>11</sup>

It would be unfair to say that pastors are preaching the idea that people become angels when they die. But it would be accurate to say that preaching and teaching a bodiless eternal life, as Gibbs addresses, could unintentionally support this belief unwittingly held by the person in the pew. The separation of the body and soul, death, is an unnatural and disastrous consequence of the Fall – a tragic intrusion into human existence. Pieper states in his *Christian Dogmatics*, “Bodily death is nothing less than a tearing asunder of man, the separation of the soul from the body, the unnatural disruption of the union of soul and body which have been created by God to be one.”<sup>12</sup> A sermon which is vague about, or neglects to mention, the resurrection of the body being God’s solution for the death of the body, proclaims a hope which is unrealistic because it will not allow death, even though it be in Christ, to be God’s punishment for sin.<sup>13</sup> Failure to acknowledge death as a ‘fearful catastrophe’ inappropriately places the final reward at the grave, and declares death a good and natural part of a human’s existence. Inadvertently this will cheat God’s people of true comfort in Christ, leaving them alone to search for comfort somewhere else. The danger is that Satan could lead them to a book like Charles Townsend’s or Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s and urge them to believe that people die and become angels or that death frees the soul from an earthen vehicle, respectively.

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<sup>11</sup> Luther’s Works. Vol. 28. 64. (italics mine)

<sup>12</sup> Francis Pieper. *Christian Dogmatics: Volume I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950). 536.

<sup>13</sup> God did not intend for his creation to decay and die, rather it is a consequence of sin. Wingren, 76-79.

Although a bodiless existence and the transformation of a dead human to an angel are not the same, the belief in either one or both can undermine the article of faith concerning the resurrection of the body. Luther warns that the article of faith concerning the resurrection of the dead can be lost. He states, “For the devil surely presses us hard and assails us and also great men with the temptation to disbelieve this article or to doubt it.”<sup>14</sup> The believers in Corinth, as addressed by Paul in I Corinthians 15, were having problems retaining this belief amongst false teachers. Among his own contemporaries, Luther recognizes the trouble in maintaining this article of faith.<sup>15</sup> Luther states,

... It is the very devil when this finds its way into the pulpit and the article of faith is assailed by those who are preachers, and, following men open their despicable mouth and instill this in the people, they above all others work this murderous damage, especially if they are learned and very intelligent. For if only the pastors remain faithful and preserve the doctrine, God will bestow His grace that there will always be a number to accept it; for where the Word is pure and unadulterated, there will, of course, be fruit.<sup>16</sup>

The problem arises not only in funeral sermons but also in teaching, preaching, conversations and counseling concerning the resurrection of the dead. Of course, the pastor is not alone in his preparation of sermons and funeral services. There are various resources provided by the church to assist its pastors in this preparation and significantly shape their thinking and speaking. The rest of this chapter will focus on four of these

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<sup>14</sup> Luther's Works, Vol. 28, 61.

<sup>15</sup> “...yet if three could be found who believed this article, we should say that these were many.”  
Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 62.

resources:<sup>17</sup> 1) the funeral rite, 2) the pericopes,<sup>18</sup> 3) hymns and 4) curriculum and related material.

Although it would perhaps be inaccurate to say that the church is teaching an incorrect theology of the resurrection of the dead, it is too often unclear what the church is teaching and preaching in relation to this article of faith. It seems that the true hope founded on Christ's return and the reunion of body and soul does not even receive a hint of mention in comforting those who mourn, in counsel of the hopeless, or in preaching and teaching.

This chapter will look at the four items chosen for study and consider the opportunity they provide not only to hint toward the truth of the resurrection of the dead, but to focus upon it clearly and hence provide hope and comfort for the child of God. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has some good material which clearly states the orthodox faith in the resurrection of the dead. But the Synod also has some material which, perhaps inadvertently, in light of modern beliefs exposed in this thesis, could confuse its members. If these confounded messages are focused on too much, it could

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<sup>17</sup> The resources will be taken from both the hymnals of the LCMS and their Agendas. The hymnals of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod are referred to by their letters. *Lutheran Worship* is referred to as LW, *The Lutheran Hymnal* as TLH, and the new hymnal to be released for purchasing in 2007, *The Lutheran Service Book* will be referred to as LSB. For convenience and familiarity these hymnals and their Agendas will be referred to in the text by their abbreviations, rather than their formal titles. The Lutheran Service Book will not be published and sold until 2007. The author is using a final edited draft for her research. *Lutheran Worship*, which was published in 1983, will be the main focus. Although some of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod churches still use *The Lutheran Hymnal* and its Agenda, the funeral services in this hymnal are more of a sketch than the other two and it gives much less reference material than the LW or the LSB draft.

<sup>18</sup> 'Pericope' is a term which relates to the Scripture lessons used during a worship service for a given week. These are set up for the church by either an ancient structure or variation by a church body to focus on a specific topic which needs addressing in the church. (Minor changes have also been made by the LCMS within the pericope cycle with the publishing of the new Lutheran Service Book (LSB). Topics such as Ephesians 5:1ff were placed within its lectionary so that some focus on marriage would be considered within the church.)

plausibly lead parishioners to believe a heterodox doctrine. Yet, it does not matter if the resource material on this article of faith is good or bad, if it is never read and applied in the lives of those who preach, teach and live the Christian faith it will be difficult for any of the members, clergy or laity, to maintain a solid understanding and working theology of this article of faith—the resurrection of the body. When the resurrection of the dead is studied and maintained as a regular focus in the life of the church, through worship, study, and special services, a realistic hope will be proclaimed, and, by God's grace, believed by all the people. This will be evidenced as people identify death as what it is—bad and unnatural, and calling God's solution, bodily resurrection, what it is—good and true. God's child will no longer need to seek false, satanic comfort in believing her loved ones are angels who watch over and protect her. Instead, she will unashamedly mourn death, and also wait with anticipation for the day when Christ will return, ultimately declaring victory over Satan and the grave, the day when she will be reunited, body and soul, with all her loved ones who have died with faith in Jesus Christ.



## THE FUNERAL RITE

The funeral rites within both the LW Agenda and the LSB Agenda draft include full rites for commendation of the dying, the funeral service (at the funeral home or the church) and a committal for the graveside.<sup>19</sup> The TLH Agenda does not provide a worship structure; rather, it gives suggestions for parts of the worship to be placed into one of the other services within TLH. It specifically gives direction for a worship service of Christian burial from home or church as well as committal at the graveside, but does not include other rites found in either LW or LSB.<sup>20</sup>

Although TLH may seem limited and without variety of liturgy, the message about the hope for the Day of Resurrection is clear. A clear example of this clarity can be identified as one examines the prayer to be said at the lowering of the casket into the grave.<sup>21</sup> Although some of these rites have options, such as the Scripture lessons to be read, the prayer at the graveside is standard for the service in all the Agendas. The only option would be not to include a prayer at this time.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Commission on Worship of the LCMS. *Lutheran Worship Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984.) 162 – 200. Commission on Worship of the LCMS. *LSB Agenda draft*. 1 – 70. It should be noted that a service for the death of a stillborn or unbaptized child are also included in both Agendas.

<sup>20</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. *The Lutheran Hymnal Agenda*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948). 63-103. This Agenda seems to give a limited number of verses and liturgy and it is concise in all its parts.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 5.

<sup>22</sup> It would not be appropriate practice nor recommended to eliminate this prayer. Even though the TLH prayers seem more clear in their proclamation of hope in the resurrection of the dead, the LW and LSB draft prayers also give a picture, be it unclear about when the victory over death is realized.

In all three Agendas, a myriad of choices are offered for the Scripture lessons used in the funeral service.<sup>23</sup> The rubrics<sup>24</sup> of the service point to the use of these options, yet the LSB draft rubric at the beginning of the service suggests the Pastor may consider using Scripture which he used when he ministered to the one who has just died.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes pastors may not follow the rubrics or the suggested passages in the Agenda and instead ask the family to share their favorite passages using those selections during the funeral rite.<sup>26</sup> Even though these Scripture passages will certainly not speak against the resurrection of the dead, family members may not be familiar with the Scripture which points toward the hope in the resurrection of the dead, and therefore it is possible they will not choose those passages.

Although it may seem comforting and appropriate to allow the family to assist with the planning of the funeral service, it is ultimately the responsibility of the pastor to lead his people to know the truth and hope in the resurrection of the dead. While the sermon may well declare the hope-filled truth of the bodily resurrection, an entire service that focuses on this truth would be even clearer and more beneficial to the mourners.

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<sup>23</sup> Within TLH and LW Agendas, the choices are found within the service layout. In the LSB draft these options are found in a special section so that all choices are found and may be used with ease. Although this is good, the choices are even more numerous than the other two Agendas.

<sup>24</sup> Rubrics are the directions given throughout the worship service to assist the pastor or leader in conducting the service in appropriate order. These directions may be found in each Agenda, and hymnal in the worship services printed in red and italic print.

<sup>25</sup> LSB draft.

<sup>26</sup> As I have talked with various pastors, and recall the experience of planning my father's funeral service, it seems that some pastors believe it is more personal when the Scripture has been chosen by the one who is dying or their family, so that the service will offer some familiar comfort. Rarely chosen as the Scripture text, in services prepared either by pastors or by family members, is any portion of 1 Corinthians 15. It may possibly be the case that family members are unaware of this specific passage about the resurrection of the body. This problem will be addressed further in the next section of this chapter.

Thus, the Scripture lessons should also be correlated with the proclamation of this anticipated hope. The Scripture lessons are often printed in the bulletin, whereas the sermon is not, which allow mourners to read and re-read the message of hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Of course, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, retaining a pure belief regarding the resurrection of the body does not originate or depend upon the funeral service alone. Other means, such as the weekly Sunday pericopes and faithful preaching, help pastors preach and teach their people. With such a consistently focused teaching on the Resurrection, when congregational members do arrive at the portal of death and want to plan a funeral service, or are invited to assist the pastor in planning a funeral service for their loved one, they will have learned to desire the hope-filled proclamation in the Scriptures which declare the hope in the resurrection of the body on the Last Day.

## THE PERICOPES

Many verses in Scripture speak about the hope of eternal life and the resurrection of the dead. But, of course, interpretation of Scripture is important when one reads these passages. If a proper working theology of the second coming is not in place, it is conceivable that these “resurrection passages” will be interpreted incorrectly. And an incorrect interpretation could easily lead to or reinforce the consideration of the interim state as the final reward of eternal life. An example of an incorrect interpretation may occur when a member is posed with the question, “Where is the promise of the resurrection of the body proclaimed clearly in the Scriptures?” and they respond, “Christ’s promise to the thief on the cross”. In this account, Jesus promises the thief, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, because of a non-existent working theology of the second coming, this answer would be incorrect, for although it is true that this is Jesus’ promise, it would be incorrect to say that the thief is now experiencing paradise fully, that is, with his body and soul united. Instead, this passage does not refer to the resurrection of the dead, but rather to the interim state (of which Scripture speaks rarely). Misunderstanding this text could lead a person into exactly the wrong views this thesis seeks to expose. Other Scripture passages which do speak about the Day of Resurrection are too often reinterpreted to speak improperly about the interim state. Jeff Gibbs gives ‘pride of place’ of this incorrect interpretation of Scripture to John 14 as he says, “(It is) preached at funerals as if the soul of the departed Christian were already in

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 23:43.

the 'heavenly mansion' that Christ has prepared."<sup>28</sup> Hence this preaching seems to lead members to then believe that death is a synonym for entering the 'heavenly mansion', instead of death remaining bad and unnatural.<sup>29</sup> It denies what a person knows about humanity and what Scripture teaches: a person is both body and soul.

Jeff Gibbs states, "The sun has been eclipsed by the moon."<sup>30</sup> The moon, he goes on to state, is the belief that Christians are waiting to 'die and go to heaven' or waiting for 'the interim state'.<sup>31</sup> In the murky light of this 'eclipse'; texts which refer to the Day of Resurrection, including 1 Corinthians 15, are used to speak about the day of one's death and the interim state as the ultimate goal. A text which is used this way is, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55) This incorrect interpretation of this passage reveals itself explicitly when the text becomes an endorsement for naming a funeral service a "Celebration Service" or a "Victory Service." This text, incorrectly placed as a declaration about the interim state, can confuse and actually lie to the people who are grieving the loss of their loved one.

Perhaps it is not immediately apparent why it is important to identify and correct this incorrect interpretation of eschatological passages. One may argue that it is "all

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<sup>28</sup> Jeff Gibbs. "Regaining Biblical Hope," 317

<sup>29</sup> A wife and mother wrote a thank you note in the church newsletter to all the people who prayed while her husband was ill and then when he entered the heavenly mansion. Death was not mentioned in the note. The body of her husband is not united with her husband, but that is not considered in the note, rather there is a misplaced declaration of completion referring wrongly or incorrectly to the interim state.

<sup>30</sup> Gibbs, 315.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

eternal life” and whether it is understood to refer to the final state or the interim state, it is still referring to eternal life and can give hope. The danger of not focusing on the resurrection of the body as an anticipated event is that it robs believers of the hope provided by God’s solution to death: the resurrection of the body. Moreover, these Scriptural passages refer to things which need a body, such as living in heavenly mansions,<sup>32</sup> seeing Christ in the flesh,<sup>33</sup> and joining in a great feast (eating). Without God’s solution of the resurrection of the body, and since the body of the one who has died is, usually, lying in a cold and dark grave, the grieving are left to picture merely a spiritual, immaterial ‘body’, and possibly one which is angelic.

Yet, it would be incorrect to believe that the Scripture relating the hope of the resurrection of the body is unclear and therefore is always improperly interpreted by pastors or congregation members leading people to believe in a purely spiritual, bodiless, eternal life. Among many ‘resurrection texts’, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-58 in particular speaks explicitly of the resurrection of creation. Specifically verses 39-49 include an unequivocal distinction between the creatures in life before death and life at the day of resurrection. Hence, the problem does not arise from a lack of Scriptural references to the resurrection of the body. Rather, it may be because of the infrequency of these texts being read and heard respectively, by pastors and the congregation members during the regular Sunday service. General observation of the pericopes can determine that 1 Corinthians 15 is rarely assigned within the three year cycle as a text for direct attention

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<sup>32</sup> John 14.

<sup>33</sup> Job 19:26-27.

to the resurrection of the body.<sup>34</sup> The frequency of any part of 1 Corinthians 15 appearing in the pericope system for the three year series is at least once a year.<sup>35</sup> The most any portion of 1 Cor. 15 can appear in one pericope series is five times in series C.<sup>36</sup> It is realistically possible that one of these five Sundays may actually offer a sermon focused upon the Day of Resurrection. The LSB new pericope series C, focuses all the lessons for the Last Sunday of the Church Year on passages referring to the Eschaton. With at least one Sunday of the church year focused on the Day of Resurrection, the church will have the opportunity, continually, to renew its working theology of the second coming of Christ, and with it persistently sustain the hope of the resurrection and anticipation of the reunion of body and soul at the eschaton.

Nonetheless, the Scriptures read and preached in worship are not the only message people are hearing about eternal life. As pointed out in chapter two of this thesis, other sources frequently overshadow the Scriptural truth of the resurrection of the body. If a woman believes that her son became an angel when he died because she has read Charles Townsend's book *The Littlest Angel* every Christmas since her son was

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<sup>34</sup> This is not to imply that only when this text is used is a pastor is able to address the topic of the resurrection. If a pastor has a working theology of the second coming of Christ, he would be able to apply it in many ways.

<sup>35</sup> This is the case following the new lectionary provided in the LSB, where 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 is offered as the Epistle text for Easter sunrise service in every series: A, B, and C.

<sup>36</sup> Although it is possible for some portion of 1 Cor. 15 to appear five times in one year (series C), this would vary by the length of the Epiphany season, since three of the times any portion of 1 Corinthians 15 is possible are found in weeks 6, 7, and 8 of Epiphany. Since the Epiphany season is an average of five weeks and sometimes as short as four weeks, it is possible that only one year in 25 years will have an eight week Epiphany season. It must also be considered that the two other options for lessons, the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel may be more viable options for the pastor to choose, thus the resurrection text may be missed even when rarely available.

born, then her understanding of the resurrection of the body is tainted by this belief and will be part of her ‘filter’.<sup>37</sup> If she then reads or hears about the resurrection of the dead, she may dismiss or reinterpret it because it seems uncomfortable.

Luther is willing to accept the possibility that the congregation’s membership will not believe a specific article of faith. But he has harsh words for a preacher who does not believe the article of faith.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Luther asserts that the pastoral office is responsible for the purity of the doctrine as he states, “For if only pastors remain faithful and preserve the doctrine, God will bestow His grace that there will always be a number to accept it; for where the Word is pure and unadulterated, there will, of course, be fruit.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, pastors must be aware that while other beliefs may be held by their congregation members, they must be bold in holding to the trustworthiness of God’s Word, maintaining all articles of faith. In light of this thesis, ‘resurrection passages’ especially should be studied and applied for correct and deliberate use in counseling sessions, as well as in general conversations with parishioners – the doctrine of the Resurrection must be clearly proclaimed.

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<sup>37</sup> Man filters information which has been given to him through a variety of means, depending upon the information received. If one has been raised to believe that God created the world in six days he will put any information related to the issue through the filter of this belief. So the same with a view of eternal life. Kübler-Ross agrees with this filtering process as she says those who are dying experience and see what they believe. e.g. a Catholic may see the Virgin Mary coming to him, another Christian may see Jesus. Each person’s filter tells him what to believe as true. For more on the importance of hermeneutics and the list as interpreter, see James Voelz. *What Does This Mean?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Luther says, “When such men open their despicable mouth and instill this in the people, they above all others work this murderous damage, especially if they are learned and very intelligent.” Luther’s Work. Vol. 28... 62.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



Nevertheless, Scripture readings are not the only part of regular worship which can relate a pure or unfortunately a contaminated understanding of the true Biblical hope in the Day of Resurrection. Lutheran hymnody proclaims a message as well.

## THE HYMNS

When a person is recognized as a Lutheran, she is identified as one who loves to sing, and not just sing, but harmonize.<sup>40</sup> Hymnody is important in the church, so much so that Luther places it second to the Scriptures in teaching the faith.<sup>41</sup> It is through this hymnody that people first come to know theology.<sup>42</sup> They are reminded of hymns such as “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” “Beautiful Savior,” “A Mighty Fortress,” “Abide with Me,” “For All the Saints,” and others. Older members scoff at the modern hymns, sometimes known as contemporary hymns, which repeat the same seven words eleven times and do not seem to relate substantial material. Yet, when looking at even the ‘traditional’ hymns which today’s Lutherans, young or old, might choose at the death of a loved one, it is frequently the case that they do not speak specifically about hope in the resurrection of the dead, but too often refer only to ‘eternal life’.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Garrison Keillor, the author of the Lake Wobegon books and host of a weekly show on National Public Radio, grew up in Northern Minnesota, among Lutheran Norwegians, and jokes regularly about the behavior of Lutherans. One of the topics he jokes about is Lutheran singing. He says, “Lutheran children grow up on the chests of their church-going family who sing the bass, tenor and alto parts as well as the melody to the hymns.” Garrison Keillor. *Prairie Home Companion*. National Public Radio Spring 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Luther’s Works. *Liturgy and Hymns*, Volume 53 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1965), 321-323.

<sup>42</sup> Those who worship regularly will hear the hymnody on a consistent basis. Educators will often use music or rhythm to help students learn material. It has been said of many students that they can sing the songs on the radio but can’t remember the details of their homework. Music is important in learning, especially in the church. Children who attend Vacation Bible School are a decent example of this; in December they may still be singing the songs they learned during that one week period in July.

<sup>43</sup> Eternal life is not a bad focus, yet in light of the problem discussed in this thesis – the idea that people become angels when they die, it is dangerous for the church to offer only a general focus on eternal life. To combat a world with a variety of beliefs about ‘eternal life’ a specific hope and description of the promised resurrection in the Scriptures is needed to maintain an orthodox belief.

Sadly, even our hymnody often affirms the belief that the body is only a shell and that eternal life is to be experienced as a bodiless existence. Take, for example, the hymn, “For Me to Live is Jesus.” The focus is on eternal life, living in heaven, but the goal is to merely die and “go to heaven”. The earthly body is given little or no value; it may even seem as if Jesus takes pleasure in the death of one of his children because when one is in the body he is away from the Lord. Therefore death is welcomed. Stanzas one and two of this hymn, “For Me to Live is Jesus,” illustrate this:

For me to live is Jesus, to die is gain for me;  
So, when my Savior pleases, I meet death willingly.

For Christ, my Lord, my brother, I leave this world so dim  
And gladly seek another, where I shall be with Him.<sup>44</sup>

The last stanza does not focus on the Day of Resurrection but rather on waking in heaven, ignoring the day when Christ returns and will raise the body as it states:

This anchor of your making forever holding me,  
I will, in heav'n awaking sing heaven's melody.<sup>45</sup>

If a person believes that only angels sing the praises of God in heaven, the reference in stanza six to “singing heaven's melody” could also be misinterpreted to mean that when one awakes at death she will be an angel. Another hymn, printed in TLH “For All the Saints”, presents an unclear and twisted picture of the three modes<sup>46</sup> of eternal life by the

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<sup>44</sup> Stanzas one and two of Hymn 267 LW.

<sup>45</sup> Stanza six of Hymn 267 LW.

<sup>46</sup> Throughout this thesis Jeff Gibb's term – “interim state” has been used because it conveniently describes the second mode of eternal life. But, truly, as Louis Brighton states, eternal life has three modes. When discussing more than just the interim state, it seems more beneficial to refer to the different modes, since Gibbs doesn't ever give names to Louis Brighton's first and third modes of eternal life. Therefore, the first mode begins at baptism when faith begins, the second mode (or interim state) is experienced when

arrangement of the last three stanzas. These stanzas were restructured in LW with the result of illuminating a correct and Scriptural picture of the first, second and third modes of eternal life.<sup>47</sup>

A hymn found in the new LSB Agenda's service to comfort the bereaved<sup>48</sup> confidently states in two of its six stanzas about the dead,

Christ has wiped away their tears forever;  
They have that for which we still endeavor.  
By them are chanted  
Songs that ne'er to mortal ears were granted.

Come, O Christ, and loose the chains that bind us;  
Lead us forth and cast this world behind us.  
With You, th' Anointed,  
Finds the soul its joy and rest appointed.

Although it is true that one who dies in Christ no longer continues to toil in this world and rests in the presence of the Lord, this hymn's stanzas are not clear about the promise of the Day of Resurrection. Another small change in this stanza made in the revision from LW to LSB may seem an insignificant point, but the new wording may support the view that humans become angels at death. The words, "By them are chanted songs that ne'er to mortal ears were granted" are revised from the LW version which says, "To you are chanted songs that to no mortal ear are granted." The difference may seem that of a

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one's body and soul are torn apart in death, and the third mode will begin when Christ returns and the body and soul are reunited, making man complete.

<sup>47</sup> The comparison can be found between the two hymnals in Appendix G. The Commission on Worship has chosen to maintain the stanza structure of LW for this hymn in the LSB.

<sup>48</sup> This hymn portion is not listed or titled in the LSB draft Agenda page 28. Rev. John Vieker, from the LCMS Commission on Worship, said it is a revised version of the hymn "Oh, How Blest Are You". This hymn is also found in its entirety in *Lutheran Worship* in the section titled Death and Burial hymn #268, where the fourth stanza remains the same. According to Rev. Vieker, this newly revised hymn will be titled, "How Blest Are You Whose Toils Are Ended" in the LSB.

prepositional phrase, but it is significantly different whether the dead are participating in the singing or hearing the songs. If, as was stated above, it is thought that angels are the only participants in heavenly song, this change in the hymn is noteworthy. At the very least, the proclamation of this stanza, if not the entire hymn, is unclear and incorrect, either incorrectly declaring death as the final reward, or speciously claiming death to be what man seeks in life. And the final stanza:

“Come, O Christ, and loose the chains that bind us;  
Lead us forth and cast this world behind us.  
With you, th’ Anointed,  
Finds the soul its joy and rest appointed”

ambiguously points either to the interim state or to Christ’s return and the reunion of body and soul.

If death is the goal, then believing that a man will die and be given a new life as an angel is not a big problem. The belief that everyone will have an eternal life fits well with what a person, even a non-Christian person, is taught to believe by the world. Most religions believe in some kind of eternal life.<sup>49</sup> Kübler-Ross, who did not claim a specific religion, confidently asserted the beginning of a new existence as soon as the body releases the true human. From belief in the afterlife, it isn’t too far a stretch to include the activity of the dead person in the lives of those who are still living. After all, even Scripture says that God provides His people with angels to protect them. These various errors have a common remedy: clear teaching of the Resurrection of the Body.

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<sup>49</sup> ABC: “Heaven: Where Is It? and How Does One Get There?” 20 December, 2005. Barbara Walters reported on the view of Heaven or eternal life in various religions, the two hour special spent one hour on Christianity (Catholic, Baptist, and Evangelical), Judaism and Islam, the second hour spent time on Buddhism, Islamic Jihad and Aethiists. Except for the Buddhist and the Aethiists, every group believed in some sort of ‘heaven’.

What separates orthodox Christianity from the other religions is the declaration of the resurrection of the body. We must be careful not to lose it.

Of course, not every hymn is expected to be eschatological. And even an error in ordering the stanzas does not deem the hymn unorthodox. One may wonder if there are hymns that do address the article of faith concerning the resurrection of the dead.

Happily, the answer is a resounding: Yes! They are not, however, found in what would seem to be the obvious place in the hymnal. While a person might look for the hope of the resurrection of the dead in the hymnal's section on death and burial, he is more likely to find that message in hymns associated with Advent. The hymns for this liturgical season focus on the second coming of Christ and correlate with the eschatologically oriented Scripture lessons for the Last Day of the Church Year.<sup>50</sup> Hope is a continuous theme in the Advent season, specifically a hope both in Christ's first coming in Bethlehem as well as His second coming at the Day of Resurrection. Advent hope is never focused on bodily death or an angelic existence, but rather on the coming of Christ. "Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord," especially stanzas six and seven, provide a good example, allowing death to be death but also trusting the gift of faith to keep man through both life and the grave.<sup>51</sup>

Bruise for me the Serpent's head that,  
Set free from doubt and dread,  
I may cling to you in faith,  
Safely kept through life and death.

Then when you will come again

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<sup>50</sup> Refer to the section above on the pericopes for these days in the church year.

<sup>51</sup> "Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord," LW 33.

as the glorious king to reign,  
I with joy will see your face,  
Freely ransomed by your grace.

The frequency of these Advent hymns sung in worship is typically limited to the three (possibly four) Sundays of the annual Advent season.<sup>52</sup> Of course, the number of opportunities to sing these hymns in worship doubles when the church conducts midweek services for the Advent season.

The hymn, “Lord, You I Love with all my Heart”, as identified by Jeff Gibbs, safeguards a pure and beautiful picture of the last two modes of eternal life, including an appropriate Scriptural depiction of the angels’ role in the death of man as well as the anticipation of the reunion of body and soul. The hymn declares:

Then let at last your angels come,  
To Abram’s bosom bear me home  
That I may die unfearing.  
Within my earthen chamber keep  
My body safe in peaceful sleep  
Until your reappearing.  
And then from death awaken me,  
That my own eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, your glorious face,  
My Savior and my ground of grace!  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
Oh hear my prayer;  
Oh hear my prayer,  
Your love surround me everywhere.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of hymnody in the lives of the body of Christ cannot be denied. And although not all hymns speak about the Day of Resurrection, nor must they, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Special concerts and hymn sings provide the opportunity for people to hear and sing these hymns more often.

<sup>53</sup> LW 413 stanza three. This hymn is found in the LW section titled Trust.

important for the ones which do intend to teach about this end to do it well. Care must be taken that hymns do not inadvertently obscure the hope and anticipation for Christ's return and the reunion of human bodies and souls by focusing merely and wrongly on the second mode, the interim state, while ignoring the final mode – the reality of bodily resurrection.



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A significant part of the heritage of the Lutheran church is its emphasis on education reflected in the proclamation of Bible study material, confirmation curriculum, Sunday School curriculum, and even day school curriculum. Since the establishment of the Lutheran church on American soil, education has been important to its existence.<sup>54</sup> Today, within the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod the continued maintenance of schools and preschools appears to remain a high priority. Yet, when paging through the list of titles available for study, one will be hard pressed to find a lesson devoted to Day of Resurrection or the Eschaton. Granted, this may be too complex a topic to be age-appropriate for very young children, and may perhaps be hitting too close to home for those who are in their final years.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, one way CPH has tried to address the need to discuss death with children is to publish children's books intended to assist teachers and parents in educating children about death. These resources can, however, oversimplify the subject to an extent that the truth is distorted and confused. An example of such a book is *What Happened When Grandma Died*.<sup>56</sup> The book addresses death by discussing three things left behind when Grandma died and then correlating them with

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<sup>54</sup> This remains evident as the LCMS' publishing house writes a religious curriculum, *Voyage*, for its day school programs for grades K – 12, and a confirmation program for 7 – 8 grades, as well as many Bible studies for congregation members to learn more about their faith.

<sup>55</sup> It cannot be entirely known why the publishing house decides to choose some topics over others. They determine their printing schedule in advance, the topics come from within the office and from what they know people are working to print, rather than from any type of survey or study of what membership is looking to purchase. (Writing for the Church Workshop, August 18, 2005, Section discussion with Ed Engelbrecht)

<sup>56</sup> Peggy Barker. *What Happened When Grandma Died*, Illustrated by Patricia Mattozzi, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984).

three things she gained when she died. The father says, “(The things left behind) were very old. They were things she would never need again.” These things are her body, her home and her old life. The three new things are what God has promised to those who believe in Him: a new body, a new home and a new life. The book oversimplifies and incorrectly claims all these things are given upon death. The new body is confusingly acknowledged to be known as grandma, but that it will not be the same body which is buried in the ground. The second promise, that of a new home, is placed in the interim state, rather than an anticipated hope as the child in the book says, “Dad said that the Bible promises us that God has given Grandma a new home in heaven . . . a new place to live. She is living in it right now. And she will always be happy there.”<sup>57</sup> And the third promise, a new life, places the beginning of new life at death and ignores the provision of new life given at Grandma’s baptism while she lived on earth. The book simply makes this life on earth something to flee, as if Christians were standing on earth waiting for God to ‘beam them up’ out of this world.<sup>58</sup> Sadly, this book is intended to help teach children about what happens at death.

Although it is difficult to find young adult or adult Bible studies regarding the Resurrection of the dead or the Eschaton, it is easy to find studies for these age groups on the topic of angels. These studies, one would hope, should be cognizant of the fact that teachers and students may likely have an underlying belief that dead humans are angels,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Np.

<sup>58</sup> This implies that God does not care about the body here on earth. Yet, God doesn’t just beam us up, but rather He came to us begotten of the Virgin Mary, experienced childhood, faced the death of loved ones, suffered on a cross and died. And He alone knows the resurrection of the body at this time because He is the first fruit of the grave.

and should accordingly focus at least one lesson on the distinction between the human creature and the angelic creature. One study, published by CPH in 1998 for young adults, titled “All about Angels: A Biblical Look at God’s Messengers”<sup>59</sup> is rather comprehensive in its study of angels. But in light of this thesis’ topic, it does not go far enough to make clear that the angels who watch over and protect humanity are unique creatures, and not dead humans.<sup>60</sup> An excellent adult study titled “The Story of Angels”<sup>61</sup> addresses and dispels many incorrect beliefs about angels—specifically, to the interest of this thesis, the belief that dead people are angels. It would be good to utilize this study with adult Bible classes, but because it is published by a private publishing company, it may be problematic for some congregations to use it.<sup>62</sup>

Another area of education in the church, confirmation instruction, is also important, of course, and may correct an initially rocky start. This catechesis in particular, ultimately lays the foundation for what is believed in the church. Mercifully, if this aspect of church education faithfully studies the chief parts of the catechism, a golden nugget within the Creed is always present to uphold the article regarding the resurrection of the body.

The Creed, whether the Apostles’, Nicene or Athanasian, provides a clear and powerful declaration of the resurrection of the body. Thankfully, this teaching does not

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<sup>59</sup> Jill Hartman. “All about Angels: A Biblical Look at God’s Messengers.” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998.)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 31. Resource pages 3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D.

<sup>61</sup> Donald F. Ginkel. “The Story of Angels.” (United States of America: Church Press, Inc., 1998).

<sup>62</sup> Hopefully the reference of this study in the bibliography will make this study more accessible.

disappear after a youth is confirmed, but is declared in almost every worship service by all the people to the point that this confession is memorized.<sup>63</sup> Dr. Gibbs acknowledges this poignantly as he recounts his reassurance that this article of faith is not destroyed. For he says, as soon as he mentions that Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, conference participants know exactly where this truth is declared and do not argue against him.<sup>64</sup> This confession can be used at any point in a Christian's journey through this world to reiterate Christian faith in the resurrection of the body. It is clear in its wording. Although short, it is powerful.

The fact that the LCMS confesses the creed boldly, teaches it to confirmands annually, and recites it regularly in worship, sustains a glimmer of hope that a solid working theology of the second coming of Christ and the Resurrection is not impossible. Still, it will take some effort on the part of pastors and laity if the church is to recognize the importance of the distinction between eternal life in general and the uniqueness of an eternal life that consists of all three modes.

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<sup>63</sup> No matter what part of the liturgy is changed for the sake of time, understanding or other subjective reasoning, it is imperative that the church does not lose the confession of its creed.

<sup>64</sup> The reassurance comes from speaking engagements he has had throughout the LCMS at Pastors conferences as well as other district presentations over the last ten years. This point was discussed on February 4, 2005 in an appointment with Jeffrey Gibbs to specifically discuss and research this thesis topic.

No matter where the clear confession of the resurrection of the body is found, be it in a funeral rite, the pericopes, the hymnody, or in the church's curriculum and other materials for Christian education, it will put an end to any thought that man will die and become angelic. The problem is not in the lack of solid, orthodox material relating to the resurrection of the body. The problem arises from the church not finding, recalling or using the material which is good and present in our Synod affirming faith in the resurrection of the dead. It is a dangerous proposition not to focus on this because, "... there the doors and windows stand wide ajar for all sorts of seduction to enter and for the extinction and removal of pure doctrine."<sup>65</sup>

When the resurrection of the body is a solid working theology, the thought that the body is just a vehicle or shell for life on earth may be contemplated but ultimately will be rejected by virtue of the phrase, "I believe...in the resurrection of the body". The idea that man's new body will be angelic is also rejected because the confession does not state, "a different body" or "another body", but just the resurrection of "the body." And the order is correct as well, providing comfort that the body will be resurrected and then asserting that man will have life everlasting. As long as the church remains faithful in its use of the Creeds, a trace of hope remains that the orthodox understanding, practice and teaching that man will be raised in his body, will grow and become stronger. Then Christians will neither hope to become angels when they die nor foolishly anticipate living eternally in a bodiless existence.

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<sup>65</sup> Luther's Works. Volume 28, 64.

Although it is the goal of this thesis to expose the dangers of believing that man dies and transforms into an angel, it may also prove true that a renewed focus on the resurrection of the body will provide a stronger working theology of the second coming of Christ and hence dispel the false belief this thesis seeks to expose as well as others which may develop in the future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Prior to considering the issues presented in this thesis, it is quite likely that many Lutheran believers would not have realize that ‘harmlessly’ believing that when man dies he will be transformed into an angel was a real and dangerous threat to true faith. But, if this thesis accomplished its primary goal, it has exposed the actual danger that can present itself when it is thought that angels are dead human beings. This errant belief is not subsiding, appearing once again on January 8, 2006, in the aftermath of a West Virginia coal mining disaster.<sup>66</sup>

It would be unrealistic to think that this thesis would be able to change what is written on a local business sign or in people’s minds. Yet, it is hoped that if the ideas presented in this thesis are studied and taught, there may be a change in the way that Lutheran pastors and members present the true hope of the resurrection of the body when the opportunity arises to share it. When the resurrection of the body is a focus of preaching and teaching, even though members will read or watch material that implies or poignantly states of dead men, “God has 12 new angels,” they will still profess, “The hope I have is much greater than becoming an angel. I have been called a child of God in my baptism and on the Last Day when Christ returns He will reunite me with my body—the same and yet more glorious than the one which was buried; and I will live with Him forever, as a human being!”

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<sup>66</sup> NBC’s Today Show and NBC affiliates showed a sign from West Virginia, where 12 miners were killed in a mining accident, reading: “God has 12 new angels.” NBC. “The Today Show,” 8 January, 2006. NBC affiliate in St. Louis, KSDK channel 5, showed the sign on their 10 o’clock news broadcast 7 January, 2006.

It would also be unrealistic to think that this article of faith, regarding the resurrection of the body, has been lost only within the last hundred years; and that if we put it back into focus, it will remain pure until Christ returns. Maintaining the article of faith concerning the resurrection of the dead takes effort, and will continue to take work to keep it pure. Satan may use the belief that man will die and become an angel now, but if this thought loses its attraction, he will certainly try something different to shake people from their hope in the promises of Jesus. It would be good, then, to continue studying the article of faith regarding the resurrection of the dead. Some are already doing that, but it would be good for those who labor in all areas of theology, i.e. exegetical, systematic, historical and practical theology, to consider how to reinforce and sustain a pure and orthodox teaching on the resurrection of the dead. Although this thesis examined the angelology of the Middle Ages to suggest one possible source for the idea that man transforms into an angel, there are other writings prior to this period that show signs of such beliefs existing.<sup>67</sup> While this thesis provides a limited survey of the liturgy and the worship of the church, further exploration and development could reveal additional instances of the church's worship life that can better support the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

The last and most important resource for maintaining pure doctrine in all teaching and especially when relating to the resurrection of the dead is faithfulness to the Word of God. To maintain any promise of God, the Word of God must be proclaimed in its true sense according to the analogy of faith, not adding to it or bending it to what popular

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<sup>67</sup> Boethius.



thought may dictate. It is what God says that keeps His people in the faith. He is the provider of faith, first by granting it, and then by sustaining it. But without the reinforcement from His Word, the faithful will be malnourished and the gift of faith will die.

At the present time, a malnourishment exists within God's people with regard to the doctrine of the resurrection. It is possible, and even likely, that many church-going Christians believe incorrectly that they will become angels when they die. When they believe this, they credit dead people with the protection and guidance which God provides in their lives. They are, all the while, unknowingly or knowingly, sinning, and living in hope of one more fresh 'sign' or 'message' from beyond the grave – a search that ultimately leads them to despair and loneliness. In this turmoil, they are ready targets for Satan, who delights in undermining faith. He will, no doubt, attempt to devour these vulnerable people by leading them to believe that God is not faithful to His promise. Sadly, these deluded believers may not even remember what that promise is.

The Church catholic has been given true hope in the faithful promises of God, culminating in the promise to raise each man's body and join it again to each unique soul when Christ returns in all His glory on the Last Day. However, this doctrine must be a principal part in the preaching and teaching of the church if its members are to enjoy the benefits of God's promise. If such intentional teaching is not prominent, the questions will persist and pastors, church leaders, or members, relying on their own understanding

instead of God's Word, will offer other explanations about what happens after death.<sup>68</sup>

These alternate solutions provide no more, and ultimately much less, comfort or satisfaction for the believer. In the worst case these explanations can cause more questions, in turn casting needless doubt on the promises of God. Although human beings are tempted to explain God's actions and promises instead of simply proclaiming what He says, it is instilled in Lutherans to proclaim what God says, even though His Word may seem unbelievable, foolish or even contradictory.<sup>69</sup> When Lutherans boldly proclaim the hope in the resurrection of the body, without explaining away its mystery, the comfort will be realized and the believer will be quite satisfied to anticipate the time when his soul will be reunited with his body on the day when Christ returns. And in that hope he will pray, with all believers, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

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<sup>68</sup> These explanations may be non-Scriptural or can even stretch Scripture to apply to topics that it was never meant to address. Any human explanation of God and His acts that steps beyond the bound of Scriptural Revelation is a theodicy, and a behavior of a theologian of glory. The church is not asked to explain God but instead to proclaim what He has said. To do this is a behavior of a theologian of the cross. See Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*. Lutherans are called on, by Luther, to be theologians of the cross, not allowing their human reason to question what God has said, even if it, according to human reason, contradicts itself or is a mystery.

<sup>69</sup> Lutherans are notorious, and sometimes frustratingly so, for holding two opposing thoughts in tension because God has proclaimed both to be true in His Word. e.g. man is simultaneously sinner/saint, Jesus died for the sins of all people but not all people will be saved, and Jesus' body and blood are present in the bread and wine just because Christ says it is.

## APPENDIX ONE

### ON THE SIX WINGS OF THE CHERUBIM (ANONYMOUS)<sup>1</sup>

#### **First Wing: Self-Knowledge Through Confession**

First Feather:	Truth
Second Feather:	Integrity place, time, mode, number, persons, aspects of sin revealed
Third Feather:	Endurance drives out shame, fear, contempt, despair, presumption, perversity, ignorance, forgetfulness, negligence, compulsion
Fourth Feather:	Humility a mind, tongue, face of humility
Fifth Feather:	Simplicity

#### **Second Wing: Satisfaction<sup>2</sup>**

First Feather:	Turning from evil From vanity (love of self), injustice (love of world), malice (hatred), irreverence (loss of love of God)
Second Feather:	An effusion of tears
Third Feather:	Bathing and drying the wounds of sin
Fourth Feather:	Bestowing of alms
Fifth Feather:	Prayerful devotion

#### **Third Wing: Purification of Body**

First Feather:	A virtuous eye
Second Feather:	Purity of hearing
Third Feather:	A scent of modesty
Fourth Feather:	Temperate taste
Fifth Feather:	A holy touch

#### **Fourth Wing: Purity of Mind**

First Feather:	Sincere and upright disposition of mind right and sincere desire
Second Feather:	Delight of the mind in the Lord creates and forms contemplation
Third Feather:	Thinking that is ordered and elegant

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<sup>1</sup> The description is taken from *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on Ways of Angels* 2002 32-34

<sup>2</sup> The author notes that satisfaction comforts, cures death, corrects evils, is the path to health and restores all wounds. The first and second wings, the author says, together form compunction of heart.

- pure conception of place; discerning conception of time
- Fourth Feather:           A holy will  
                                   pure mind and good will; a contemplation of peace through angelic guidance
- Fifth Feather:           Simple and pure intention  
                                   contemplative reflection through which the soul acts; through the eye of charity all acts become good

**Fifth Wing: Love of Neighbor**

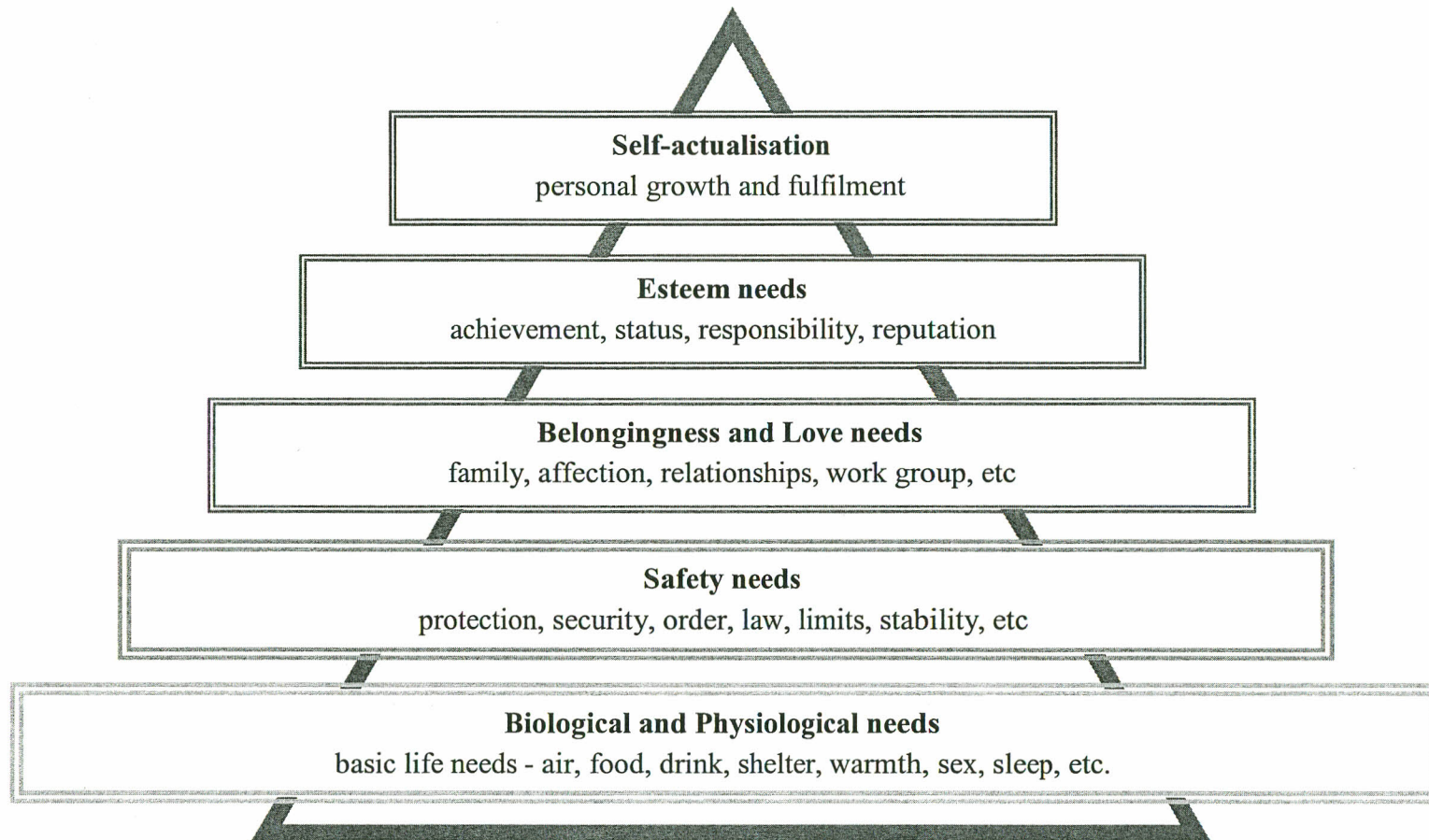
- First Feather:           Do no injury by word or deed (this is the first motion of love  
                                   forms the virtue of innocence
- Second Feather:        Do good in every word and deed (this is to breathe the living flame of love)  
                                   elevates and perfects compassion
- Third Feather:         By courtesy, not to be used up in good works (this is a friend of love)  
                                   develops the virtue of charity
- Fourth Feather:        Laying aside the soul for another (this boils up the fever of love)  
                                   illuminates the virtue of self-abandonment
- Fifth Feather:         To persevere in the love of neighbor (This is the virtue of love)  
                                   perfects the virtue of perseverance

**Sixth Wing: Love of God**

- First Feather:         Longing and striving after nothing but God  
                                   this is the motion of this love
- Second Feather:        Fecund distribution of the love of God  
                                   this is the charity of this love
- Third Feather:         To relinquish all things to God  
                                   this is the act of this love
- Fourth Feather:        Complete abandonment to the will of God  
                                   this is the boiling passion of this love
- Fifth Feather:         Perseverance in all these things  
                                   this is the unceasing nature of this love

## APPENDIX TWO

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (original five-stage model)



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**Adapted 8 levels  
Hierarchy of Needs  
diagram, based on  
Maslow's theory**



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## APPENDIX FOUR

### FUNERAL HOME POEMS AND SCRIPTURE<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Prayer

Let us not mourn their loss,  
But rather be grateful, for  
Having them – Nay – For having  
Them still. For they who have gone  
Home to God do not lose union  
With their dear ones but have merely  
Gone on before.

#### 2.

Do not stand at my grave and weep;  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow;  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn's rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush, of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft star that shines at night.  
Do not stand at my grace and cry.  
I am not there; I did not die.

Author Unknown

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<sup>1</sup> These poems are available at Cutis Funeral Home in Sunset Hills, MO. They are taken from a book containing many poems which may be printed on the back of a funeral card in a variety of styles. These are not the only poems which are given in this book, but they are the ones which pertained to this topic.

3.

When I come to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me.  
I want no nights in a gloom-filled room.  
Why cry for a soul set free?  
Miss me a little but not too long.  
And not with your head bowed low.  
Remember the love that we once shared.  
Miss me...but let me go.  
For this is a journey that we all must take,  
And each must go alone.  
It's all a part of the Master's plan  
A step on the road to home.  
When you are lonely and sick of heart,  
Go to the friends we know,  
And bury your sorrow in doing good deeds,  
Miss me ... but let me go.

Anonymous



## APPENDIX FIVE

### COMMITAL PRAYER COMPARISON

#### *The Lutheran Hymnal*

Then, while earth may be cast upon the casket, the Minister shall say:

“Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our departed *brother*, we therefore commit this body to the ground (to God’s acre); earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that is may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

May God the Father, who has created this body;

May God the Son, who by His blood has redeemed this body together wit the soul:

May God the Holy Ghost, who by Baptism has sanctified this body to be His temple, - keep these remains unto the day of the resurrection of all flesh. Amen.

I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me; Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.

I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the Latter Day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.”

(one of six options for TLH, not found in LW Agenda)

Almighty God, who by the death of Thy Son hast overcome sin and death and by His resurrection hast restored innocence and everlasting life, to the end that we should be delivered from the dominion of the devil and that by the power of the same resurrection

our mortal bodies should be raised up from the dead unto eternal life in Thy kingdom, grant that with our whole heart we may confidently believe this, and finally, with all Thy saints, be partakers of the joyful resurrection of the just; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Or:

O Everlasting God and Father, who art not a God of the dead, but of the living, and unto whom live all that dwell in dust and rest in the chamber of death, we entreat Thee of Thy fatherly goodness, let not the thoughts and the sting of death make us afraid, neither let us be troubled, but graciously keep us in Thy Son in true faith and good conscience, to the end that we may lead a Christian life, prepare for a blessed departure, and finally fall asleep and rest in peace and joy, until Thou wilt open our graves and, by the sound of the trumpet, call us forth again to life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

#### *Lutheran Worship*

The coffin is lowered into the grave or placed in its resting place. Earth may be cast on the coffin as the pastor says:

“We now commit (his/her) body to the the ground/the deep/its resting place; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body, by the power that enable him to subdue all things to himself.

May God the Father, who created this body, May God the Son, who by his blood redeemed this body, may God the Holy Spirit, who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be his temple keep this remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh.

(the only option in LW, sixth option in TLH) Almighty God, by the death of your Son Jesus Christ you destroyed death, by his rest in the tomb you sanctified the graves of your saints, and by his glorious resurrection you bought life and immortality to light so that all who die in him abide in peace and hope. Receive our thanks for the victory over death and the grave which he won for us. Keep us in everlasting fellowship with all that wait for him on earth and with in heaven who are with him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## APPENDIX SIX

### “FOR ALL THE SAINTS” COMPARISON

“For All the Saints Who from Their labors Rest” TLH 463 and LW 191

Stanzas 1 -5 are identical in both LW and TLH and will not be written. The possible concern is found in the order of 6, 7 & 8 and those will be compared in this appendix.

TLH 463 stanza 6 LW 191 stanza 7

But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of Glory passes on His way.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

TLH 463 stanza 7 LW stanza 8

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,  
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

TLH 463 stanza 8 LW stanza 6

The golden evening brightens in the west;  
Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest.  
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the blest.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

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