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### The Doctrine of the Status Intermedius in Various Areas of the Teaching of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

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#### Recommended Citation

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THE DOCTRINE OF THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS  
IN VARIOUS AREAS OF THE TEACHING OF  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1957

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SHORT TITLE

THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?"<sup>1</sup>

In his popular and influential New Testament Theology,

Ethelbert Stauffer states:

N. T. theology is theologia in conspectu mortis. So one of its cardinal questions from the beginning was "what will happen to our dead?" The N. T. Church answered the question with thoughts new and old. But she never made claim to be able to give inside information about the beyond. Yet the N. T. Church could prepare the dying for the passage through the dark portal. She signed him with the sign of the cross. That was enough.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately the succeeding generations of the Christian Church have not considered this ancient practice to be sufficient. As the age of the Church grew so grew the speculations concerning the status intermedius--the state of the believer between death and the Last Day. Many and varied theories were propounded concerning the whereabouts and activity of the faithful departed. The Roman Catholic Church developed the doctrine of purgatory. Other groups defended the teaching of soul sleep (psychopannychism). At the present time one is able to find some support for almost any opinion on this subject.

The basic reason for such a wide divergence of thought

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<sup>1</sup>Psalm 89:48.

<sup>2</sup>Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 212.



concerning the status intermedius is the lack of explicit Scriptural teaching on this subject. The New Testament is much more concerned in pointing to Judgment Day and its attending events than in giving data on the state of the individual between death and this time.

When the Scriptures do speak of this state, they use many different modes of expression. The death of the Christian is spoken of as the gathering to their own people, Gen. 25:8,17; departure in peace, Luke 2:29; departure and being with Christ, Phil. 1:23; sleep, Dan. 12:2, Matt. 9:24, John 11:11, I Thess. 4:13; rest, Heb. 4:11, Rev. 14:13; passing from death to life, John 5:24; deliverance from all evil, II Tim. 4:18; gain, Phil. 1:21. The descriptions of the activities of the departed range from those passages which speak of sleep and rest (see above) to the passages in the book of Revelation which describe the activity of the saints in heaven, Rev. 7:9-17, 14:3-5, et al.<sup>3</sup> Because of this variety of expression much latitude is possible in developing theories concerning the status intermedius.

The purpose of this study is to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of the varieties of opinion concerning the state of the believer after death current in the Lutheran

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<sup>3</sup>There is some question whether these passages refer to the status intermedius or to the state following Judgment Day.



Church--Missouri Synod.<sup>4</sup>

The author became interested in this study largely through a series of personal experiences and conversations which seemed to indicate that there might be a significant difference of opinion on this subject current in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Of special concern were various types of expressions which might be termed inexact or ambiguous.

It is the hope of the author that this study may serve to point up some of these inexact expressions and ambiguities and so, in some way, contribute to an effort to make the teaching on this subject more clear.

This paper is restricted to presenting and, as far as possible, evaluating the evidence from the various sources which present the current thought of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the status intermedius. It does not concern itself with a systematic defense or criticism of any view. Certainly there is no intention to ridicule any position.

The thesis is divided into four major sections. The first division presents the teaching of the Synod as it is stated in currently popular systematic formulations. Evidence from the various portions of the liturgy of the denomination constitutes the next section. The third section presents pertinent material from the published sermons of several pastors of the Synod. The hymnology of the church body is

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<sup>4</sup>By current opinion the author restricts this study to the period of the last twenty years (1937-1957).



studied as the final source of evidence.<sup>5</sup> A closing chapter presents a brief summary and general evaluation.

Works which have been of major importance to this study are: The Lutheran Hymnal, The Concordia Pulpit, The Lutheran Liturgy, Francis Pieper's Christian Dogmatics. Many other sources were consulted and utilized but the above were of special value. Perhaps it should be noted here that none of these sources can be said to represent the official position of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, yet, the author feels that they certainly reflect the true thought of the Synod on this subject.

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<sup>5</sup>The author recognizes the fact that the liturgical, sermonic, and hymnological material is not attempting to be as definitive as the dogmatic material. Yet, since this material constitutes much of the public teaching of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, it must strive to be as clear and unambiguous as possible.



## CHAPTER II

### DOGMATIC FORMULATIONS CONCERNING THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has no officially recognized dogmatics.<sup>1</sup> However, in this chapter various sources will be surveyed which are generally accepted as presenting the doctrinal views of the Synod.

It might be well to note before proceeding further that these dogmatic formulations proved to be the most conservative in expression and hence the least ambiguous of all the material studied.

Dr. Francis Pieper in his classic work Christian Dogmatics adopts a very conservative approach to the subject of the status intermedius. He readily admits that Scripture reveals but little of the state of the soul between death and resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Dr. Pieper does come to some conclusions concerning this state on the basis of those Scripture passages which do speak on this matter. He writes, "Of the souls of believers we are told not merely in general that they are in God's hand (Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46), but also in particular that they dwell with Christ and in Paradise (Phil. 1:23; Luke 23:43)."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This does not vitiate the fact that the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church are considered norma normata.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 511.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 512.



Dr. Pieper also concludes from the above texts that it is evident that the departed souls of believers are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of these same texts the teaching of soul sleep (psychopannychism) is rejected.<sup>5</sup> However, Dr. Pieper states in this connection that a theory of soul sleep such as Luther held which includes enjoyment of God cannot be called false doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

In this same presentation the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory is discussed and there is rejected as unscriptural any teaching of purgation of the believer after death.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Pieper also states that there is no evidence in Scripture to support the theory held by Kahnis and others that the soul is given an intermediate body until it is reunited with its former body on the Last Day.<sup>8</sup>

In concluding his discussion on the status intermedius Dr. Pieper records three facts:

1. Departed souls do not return to this world.
2. There is no Scripture warrant for attributing to the souls of the departed a direct knowledge of particular things and happenings on earth.
3. Scripture offers no hope for the conversion of departed souls.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 512-513.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 514.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 515.



Dr. Pieper's sensible and conservative position must certainly be noted. His statement that while we believe the souls of the faithful departed are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God, we know nothing further as to the manner of their blessed communion with God, is of special importance.<sup>10</sup> In the following chapters it will become apparent that this conservative position is not always maintained in the liturgy, sermons, and hymns of the Missouri Synod.

Dr. J. T. Mueller in his Christian Dogmatics, an epitome of Pieper's work, follows very closely Dr. Pieper's discussion of this subject. However, Dr. Mueller engages in a longer discussion of those statements of Scripture which speak of the dead person as being in an unconscious state. Three major passages discussed are: I Cor. 15:11, "the dead sleep"; Ps. 6:5, "the dead do not praise God"; Heb. 4:3, "they enter into rest". Dr. Mueller comes to the conclusion that such passages do not speak of the insensibility of the soul after death but are rather "figurative expressions used in a sense which Scripture clearly explains."<sup>11</sup>

Both Dr. Pieper's and Dr. Mueller's books are unquestionably valuable in discovering the current teaching of the Synod on the status intermedius. This is especially true since one or both of these books have been for many years

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 512.

<sup>11</sup>John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 617.



and are still the current dogmatics textbooks at the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's two seminaries. Their influence on the thousands of the Synod's clergymen who have studied them is an important factor to consider.

Dr. A. L. Graebner's widely used Outlines of Doctrinal Theology presents the same general position as do Mueller and Pieper. Dr. Graebner's major statement on this subject is that the soul enters into an eternal life of perfect bliss with God.<sup>12</sup> Once again there is evident a very conservative and cautious position.

The principle text for the instruction of children in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, The Synodical Catechism, is rather vague especially as to the activity of the believer after death. The catechism simply states that at the time of death the soul of the believer is at once received into the presence of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Rev. Erwin Kurth's popular Catechetical Helps also presents a very conservative statement as to the state of the believer after death. Pastor Kurth writes, "The soul does not die with the body. It does not sleep in the grave. But it is at once present with Christ."<sup>14</sup> Once again there is

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<sup>12</sup>Theodore Graebner, Outlines of Doctrinal Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 227.

<sup>13</sup>A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup>Erwin Kurth, Catechetical Helps (Brooklyn, New York: The Studio Press, c.1944), p. 104.



noted a hesitancy about describing the activity of the soul after death.

In brief summary, the general tone of the doctrinal formulations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod concerning the status intermedius is conservative. It is evident that there is an honest effort to present what Scripture has to say on this subject but not to go beyond Scripture.

It is clearly taught that the souls of departed believers are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God. The dichotomy of the individual is not stressed aside from the evident fact of the separation of the soul from the body. While the activity or lack of activity of the soul is discussed, nothing is said of the body in the same sense. It is important to note this fact here, for in the subsequent presentations the body often seems to assume a separate existence. Much is said about the departed sleeping in the grave while his soul is enjoying the bliss of heaven. The doctrinal formulations do not use this mode of speech and thus avoid much confusion. The significance for stressing this point here will become increasingly apparent as the reader progresses in this study.

It may be of significance to add that many doctrinal formulations of the Synod contain no mention of this subject. This would lead one to the conclusion that it is not generally considered a particular matter of controversy or difficulty. The reason for a lack of discussion on this matter might also



be attributed to the belief that no definite position can be taken on a topic for which there is no definite Scriptural evidence.

The liturgy of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as the various liturgical formulations quoted in the second chapter, is an important source for discovering the teaching on the status intermedius. Its normative influence is of great significance. The manner in which these liturgical formulations and prayers speak of the state of the believer after death is certain to influence the thought of both clergy and laity on this subject. It is significant to realize that these liturgical materials are used for practically every funeral and memorial service conducted in the Synod. The teaching of the liturgy is therefore well-known and of wide influence.

The liturgical formulations generally follow the conservative teaching of the Synod's dogmaticians. However, there are some formulations which seem to look at the status intermedius in a different way. This can possibly be attributed to an lax and ambiguous mode of expression. Another development in the liturgy which is of importance is the tendency to be more specific about the activity of the believer after death. As the evidence is now presented these tendencies will become apparent.

The formula of the Lutheran Liturgy for the announcement



### CHAPTER III

#### LITURGICAL FORMULATIONS CONCERNING THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS

The liturgy of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, as the various dogmatic formulations quoted in the second chapter, is an important source for discovering the teaching on the status intermedius. Its normative influence is of great significance. The manner in which these liturgical formulations and prayers speak of the state of the believer after death is certain to influence the thought of both clergy and laity on this subject. It is significant to realize that these liturgical materials are used for practically every funeral and committal service conducted in the Synod. The teaching of the liturgy is therefore well-known and of wide influence.

The liturgical formulations generally follow the conservative teaching of the Synod's dogmaticians. However, there are some formulations which seem to look at the status intermedius in a different way. This can possibly be attributed to an inexact and ambiguous mode of expression. Another development in the liturgy which is of importance is the tendency to be more specific about the activity of the believer after death. As the evidence is now presented these tendencies will become apparent.

The formula of the Lutheran Liturgy for the announcement



of a death is a good example of what might be termed the most common opinion of what happens to the individual at death:

It hath pleased Almighty God to summon out of this vale of tears to our eternal home the soul of \_\_\_\_\_, who departed this life on the \_\_\_\_\_, at the age of \_\_\_\_\_; his (her) mortal remains will be (have been) committed to the ground \_\_\_\_\_, the service being (having been) held at \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>1</sup>

In this formulation the belief is clearly expressed that the soul goes to heaven and the body is committed to the ground.

The Prayer for Easter Monday in the liturgy exhibits this same thought:

When the day is far spent and the sun is about to set, when the shadows thicken about us, in the gathering gloom of the eventide of life, in the agony and pain of death graciously abide with us and lead our souls out of this vale of sorrows into the heavenly Jerusalem. And on the last great day . . . raise up our mortal bodies and make them like unto Thy glorious body.<sup>2</sup>

This belief that the soul goes immediately to its eternal reward is also apparent in the Lutheran Hymnal's Prayers for the Sick and Dying. To the dying believer the pastor says:

Depart in peace, thou ransomed soul. . . . Enter now into Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born

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<sup>1</sup>The Lutheran Liturgy, [edited by W. G. Polack] authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [c.1947]), p. 294.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 353.



which are written in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

One of the prayers of the Committal Service also states that all who die abide in joy as to their souls and in hope as to their bodies.<sup>4</sup>

The above passages speak of a definite separation of the soul from the body of the believer. There are, however, many formulations which speak only in terms of the individual per se. As an example of this we might use the expression of one of the prayers of the Lutheran Agenda, "we have not lost him, but have only sent him before."<sup>5</sup> This mode of speech might mean one of three things. One is that the spiritual aspect of the individual, the soul, is considered the really essential part of the individual. This would answer why the soul is spoken of as the individual. The body is thought to be simply the tabernacle which the individual used in this life and which will be restored to him at the Last Day. This type of language might also be justified by saying that these passages use the common manner of speaking of a part as the whole. And so, while they might consider the body just as

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<sup>3</sup>The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c. 1941), p. 119.

<sup>4</sup>The Lutheran Agenda, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1948] ), p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 89.



essential a part of the individual as the soul, they usually speak in terms of the soul as the whole individual. A third possible explanation as to why such expressions are used might simply be that this is a careless, inexact manner of referring to the individual after death. This same problem will be apparent in the succeeding chapters and so will be discussed more fully in the concluding section of the study.

An example of this type of terminology is one of the prayers in the Lutheran Agenda. The prayer states:

At the removal of our loved ones who die in the Lord, enable us to understand that they are blessed from henceforth and go to Thee where there shall be neither sorrow nor crying, neither any more pain and where Thou wilt wipe away all tears from their eyes.<sup>6</sup>

This certainly speaks as though the essential part of the individual were in heaven.

The widely used General Prayer in the Order of Morning Service of the Lutheran Hymnal uses this same type of expression, "And when our last hour shall come, support us by Thy power and receive us into Thine everlasting kingdom."<sup>7</sup>

Two prayers of blessing for the dying from the commonly used Pastor's Companion offer the same thought:

The good and merciful God, who caused poor Lazarus to be borne into Abraham's bosom and the penitent thief into Paradise, preserve thee from the devil by the bitter suffering of Jesus Christ, His dear Son, our Lord and Savior and guide thee by His dear angels into the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 88

<sup>7</sup>The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 13.



heavenly home, that thou mayest live there with all the elect in eternal joy and bliss, whither He may help us all to go when our time here on earth is ended.<sup>8</sup>

May the gracious and merciful God by the power of the bitter suffering and death of Jesus Christ and by the ministry of the holy angels guide thee into Abraham's bosom, into the eternal home, that thou mayest live there with all the elect in unspeakable joy and bliss. May our Lord Jesus Christ be with thee to protect thee, in thee to refresh thee, before thee to lead thee into heaven, over thee to bless thee, here in time and hereafter in eternity.<sup>9</sup>

These prayers certainly seem to say that what we consider to be the individual is in heaven. If these prayers were read by a person who had never heard of the dichotomy and the resurrection of the body, he would probably think that it is being taught that the individual is in heaven and that there is no resurrection of the body or need for one.

An example of a rather ambiguous mode of expression is one of the prayers from the Lutheran Agenda to be used at the death of a child:

Thou hast cut down the flower in tender bud; help them also to see Thy gracious hand in what they suffer and to realize that what has faded from them here still blooms immortal in the heaven.<sup>10</sup>

Such terminology sounds almost neo-Platonic.

One thing, however, is clear in all these passages: the conscious existence of the individual is thought to continue

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<sup>8</sup>The Pastor's Companion, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 128.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 128

<sup>10</sup>The Lutheran Agenda, p. 85.



in heaven. There are, nevertheless, some portions in the liturgy which, at least, appear to support the position that the individual rests in the grave until the Last Day. These formulations seem to hold that the status intermedius is one of unconsciousness and that consciousness for the individual does not begin until the Second Coming of Christ. This again may be the result of an inexact and ambiguous manner of speaking about the individual after death. It may also be an accommodation to the popular way of viewing the death of a person. What is commonly and sentimentally considered to be the individual is laid into the grave. It may also be, of course, that the individual per se is really thought to rest in the grave until Judgment Day. However, this view does not seem too likely as it violates rather clear passages of Scripture.

Two prayers of the Agenda which are notable examples of this type of thought are the following:

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 . . . 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.<sup>11</sup>

that with sure confidence we may hold fast the blessed hope that we shall not die but only sleep and at the Last Day be raised up unto everlasting life.<sup>12</sup>

Especially in the first of these two prayers the thought seems

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 97.



to be that the individual is resting in the grave until the Last Day when Christ will come and raise him to life again.

One of the prayers for Baster in the Lutheran Liturgy is also an expression of this idea of the status intermedius:

Let not the thought of death fill our hearts with terror, but give us the blessed assurance that, like unto Christ, our Head, we shall not remain in our graves, but will rise again at the end of days....O Thou God of peace...draw our souls and bodies at the last perfectly to Thee, that we may live with Thee and praise Thee, world without end.<sup>13</sup>

This passage seems to infer that the soul and body is in the grave and will not be with Christ until the Last Day.

There is yet one more area of thought about the state of the individual after death which is found in the liturgy. This comprises those sections which speak about the activity of the soul after death.

The thought of the liturgy on this matter is quite conservative. It strongly favors speaking of the departed soul as resting in God. In fact, only one example could be found expressing the idea of very real activity. There are a few other passages which suggest the possibility of some activity but these are not capable of a definite interpretation. In the following chapters it will be noted that much more stress is laid upon the real activity of the soul in heaven.

The only passage which could be found in the liturgy which supports the thought of great activity of the departed

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<sup>13</sup>The Lutheran Liturgy, p. 352.



soul is a portion of the Te Deum from the liturgy for Matins. Herein it is stated, "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee, The glorious company of apostles praise Thee, The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise Thee."<sup>14</sup> This passage surely suggests that the souls of the blessed dead are participating in the very real activity of praising God.

Other passages of the liturgy speak of the soul living in eternal joy and bliss<sup>15</sup> but, as stated before, this doesn't necessarily mean that they are carrying on an active existence.

Stating the opposite viewpoint about the activity of the soul are several prayers in the Agenda. These formulations suggest that the soul is enjoying a rather passive existence. Among the prayers for the burial service are three which express this general thought:

Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of those who depart hence in the Lord and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and happiness, we give Thee hearty thanks for Thy loving kindness to all those Thy servants who having finished their course in faith, do now rest from their labors.<sup>16</sup>

The second of these prayers petitions that God would "keep us in everlasting fellowship with the Church Triumphant and let us rest together in Thy presence from our labors."<sup>17</sup> The third

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<sup>14</sup>The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup>The Pastor's Companion, p. 128.

<sup>16</sup>The Lutheran Agenda, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 84.



prayer is slightly ambiguous and it is difficult to determine whether it means the individual is resting in Christ in the grave or whether the soul is carrying on a passive existence in heaven. The former seems more likely:

O Lord Jesus Christ, who wilt come again to judge the quick and the dead and call forth all who sleep in the graves, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation, we beseech Thee to be gracious unto us and to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Thee and, having been found acceptable in Thy sight, may on the Last Day be raised up to life everlasting and inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Here, then, is the expression of the liturgical formulations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod concerning the state of the believer between death and the Last Day. It will be noted that while it is still rather conservative and cautious, it tends to be more definitive than the dogmatic formulations outlined in the previous chapter. The same areas of ambiguity and lack of clarity which became apparent in this chapter will also appear in the following chapters. Therefore a general summary and evaluation will not be attempted until the final chapter.

Lest it be thought from the preceding discussion that most of the liturgical formulations of the Missouri Synod are unclear or ambiguous, let the author hasten to add that there are many prayers and other portions of the liturgy which are

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 97.



of excellent caliber from every aspect. An example of such a formulation is the following prayer from the Lutheran Agenda:

Deliver us all, O God, from the bondage of our sins, that we may be free from the fear of death and be ready at Thy call to depart hence and be at peace. Whether we live, may we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, may we die unto the Lord. And so unite us with Jesus Christ, and work in us by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, that, whether living or dying we may be the Lord's.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 84.



## CHAPTER IV

### SERMONIC STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS

This chapter presents a study of the sermons of some thirty-five pastors of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Since these sermons have been published by the Synod's official press, Concordia Publishing House, it can be assumed that they are thought to reflect the church-body's position on the status intermedius. In fact, it could probably be said that these sermons are considered among the best funeral preaching current in the Synod.

In these sermons the same trends can be noted that began to be apparent in some of the liturgical formulations. There is an increasing tendency to depart from the conservative dogmatic formulations. Much more information is given about the actual activity of the soul after death. The terminology tends to become more exaggerated. Often the sermon is very ambiguous and even seems to present views which differ among themselves. The reader will note that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to categorize the various evidence. The writer has often had to place an example in the category where it seemed to him to fit best although it could have been placed in another classification almost as well. For the convenience of the reader, the same basic presentation of material will be followed in this chapter as was begun in chapter three. This



will enable the reader to make comparisons more quickly and with greater facility should he so desire.

Several of the sermons which were studied present what we might term the classic definition of what happens to the believer at death--the body rests in the grave and the soul goes to heaven. Of the many illustrations of this position which might be quoted the following three passages are among the most clear and representative:

Your dear child has been removed from every temptation, from sin, and all ills; its soul has winged its flight to the heavenly mansions. And on the Last Day its dead body, lying before us, will rise in glory and be reunited with the soul.<sup>1</sup>

He will remind you that the departed is not dead, but sleepeth. That the dead which die in the Lord are blessed, because they rest from their labors, because they are removed from all anxieties and sorrows to which we are still exposed. He will assure you that the soul of your departed husband and father is even now in the presence of the Savior, where there is fullness of joy; that his body will soon rest in the grave, awaiting the great day of resurrection; that then the soul and body will be united again, and according to soul and body he will enter into the joy of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

His soul has gone to the realms of eternal life and light, where Christ dwells. There he is being comforted. His broken body will be placed as seed into the ground, to be raised from the dust on the Last Day, the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, then to be like to the glorious body of our Savior. His immortal self will dwell with God in joy and glory forever.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Concordia Pulpit (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), IX, 440.

<sup>2</sup>William H. Eifert, editor, The Life that Never Ends (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1949), pp. 55-56.

<sup>3</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XXII, 468.



In general it could be said that these passages are of a conservative nature. They follow the dogmatic formulations quite closely. What they are trying to convey about the status intermedius is clear and unambiguous.

The next group of selections, however, raises some difficulties. These passages seem to view the soul of the departed as the whole person. They no longer keep clear the soul--body relationship. The body is generally ignored. While this may be attributed to the practice of speaking of the part as the whole, in this situation it is not very justifiable as it causes much unnecessary confusion and ambiguity. Since this idea of the soul as the whole person is closely connected with the thought of great activity in heaven, much of this type of expression will also be found in this section. However, a systematic presentation of material on the activity of the soul will be treated in another part of this chapter.

Several examples of this type of expression are the following passages:

This is your comfort, beloved family. Your loved one walked with God here on earth. He is now, as we confidently believe, enjoying the unending companionship of his heavenly Father.<sup>4</sup>

Now he has gone to the very place to which his Master went when His life's work was finished.<sup>5</sup>

She has now been delivered from all evil and is at home with the Lord in Paradise, where there is neither sorrow

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<sup>4</sup>Rifert, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 415.



nor crying nor pain but fulness of joy and pleasure forevermore.<sup>6</sup>

Now she is in the bliss of heaven. All is fulfilled in her which her gracious God had pledged. You who mourn her passing this day, surely you are thankful that she has gained the bliss of life eternal.<sup>7</sup>

While the next selections use the term "soul," they certainly seem to use it in the sense of the whole individual:

It is only a case of removal. The camping ground has been changed for the purpose of providing a richer pasturage for the flock. Through the removal of the shepherd's tent the flock has been led from the meagre fields to the green pastures and the still waters of a better country. Then death is not a departure but an arrival, not a sleep but an awakening. Then life itself is not a mournful funeral procession, but a triumphant march to victory. . . . It is the life which is night, and death is sunrise. . . . Those on the other side must hail the completing of the pilgrimage by another saint with ineffable rapture. The Father runs to meet it and kisses it.<sup>8</sup>

Stricken on her way to sit at the feet of Jesus, her soul winged its way into eternity, where she can now see Him face to face and be with Him forevermore.<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein are the following four selections:

As his soul winged its way heavenward, he was no doubt greeted at the shining portals of Paradise by His Lord and Master, whom he served so faithfully on earth. Unquestionably Jesus greeted him with the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant," and thereupon placed on his brow the crown of eternal righteousness. . . . Our Savior turns His loving eyes to you, the bereaved and sorrowing family and assuring you that your father and husband will wait for you at the portals of Paradise when someday you leave this world and enter your heavenly home.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XIV, 76.

<sup>7</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XXVII, 461.

<sup>8</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 428-429.

<sup>9</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XXVII, 455.

<sup>10</sup>Rifert, op. cit., p. 77.



Is there any doubt in your minds, my dear mourning friends, as to the eternal safety of your beloved mother and relative? Not if God's Word is true; not if the Lord Jesus is correct in saying: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Not if the word stands: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth." She is now with that loving Savior, blessed forevermore, enjoying in all eternity the bliss of the saints in light. And she is waiting for you.<sup>11</sup>

Early on Saturday morning the soul of Ellen left a weakened body and passed to heaven's joy and the bosom of God. . . . A great time has now begun for her. Her sorely afflicted body and her life of trial she has already forgotten. Questions that puzzle us are clearly answered for her as she abides under the infinite intelligence of Heaven. Our service to the Lord is so imperfect here. She can wait on Him after the manner of an angel.<sup>12</sup>

I close with the statement that death is God's way of colonizing heaven. The halls of God would be silent and the mansions empty if it were not for the ministrations of death. . . . First one member of the family embarks upon that distant voyage. The parting here below is hard, but it will not be forever. There is a happy home and a sweet reunion awaiting the others on that far-off shore that is washed by the sea of immensity.<sup>13</sup>

While the following passage affirms the belief in the resurrection of the body, it certainly speaks as though the soul were the really important thing:

We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. N.N. is not dead; he lives. What our eyes behold here is nothing but the temporary clay tabernacle which housed his immortal soul; and that soul. . . now rejoices in the gladness unending that surrounds the throne of God. . . . His soul was as little hurt by the process of dying as is the bird the bars of whose cage you pry apart to give it liberty.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XXIII, 481.

<sup>12</sup>Eifert, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>14</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 433.



Certainly these passages ascribe everything to the soul which could be true of both body and soul. Reading these selections one wonders what more can happen to the individual at the Last Day. He has already been crowned with the eternal crown of righteousness. His activity seems to be as complete as it ever could be. It is apparent from these selections how the use of exaggerated terminology can make the teaching on the status intermedius very confusing and ambiguous.

The next group of quotations seem to say almost the opposite of the group which was just presented. In these selections the emphasis is placed on the body as truly representing the individual. The thought is that the believer remains in the grave until the Last Day and only then will enter heaven. The type of expression may be partly attributed to the sentimental attachment with which the body is regarded. Popularly the body does represent the individual. Passages which seem to support this theory are the following:

She who slumbers before us, by God's grace, was an aged mother and grandmother. . . . As we lay her to rest to-day, we look forward to the morn when God's trumpet will sound and we together with her will be privileged to enter the home of eternal bliss and glory above.<sup>15</sup>

The love of God which through Baptism drew our brother into the Kingdom of Grace has now drawn him into the Kingdom of Glory. God has removed him from a sorely troubled world. . . . He has fallen asleep on things earthly at what seems to be a late hour in the history of the world. He will sleep peacefully through all the dark years ahead. His last resting place will be the cemetery. The word "cemetery" comes from the Greek and

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<sup>15</sup>Bifert, op. cit., p. 28.



means literally "sleeping place". . . . A gift awaits our departed friend, a gift from the God who loves him-- a crown of everlasting life. God will call him back to life, and he will live forever.<sup>16</sup>

The death and burial of a Christian in reality is as when a mother rocks and hums her weeping child to sleep and then quietly tucks it away in its little bed. . . . When the thought of our own death and burial depresses us, we should then remember that we belong to Him in death as well as now in life, yea, that it is He who puts and lays us to sleep when we die, like a mother her nursing child. We should remember, even less than a nursing mother can forget her sleeping child. . . can Jesus forget us for whom He died on the cross and whom He Himself has cradled to sleep at our death.<sup>17</sup>

A final statement speaks of the body in the grave as really being the individual: "And so this grave also will receive this body, but the body will not remain there forever. Our brother will leave the grave and will live again."<sup>18</sup>

If one were to read the above passages literally, he certainly could come to the conclusion that the believer rests in the grave until the Last Day when Christ will appear and then take him to heaven.

There are, moreover, some statements which seem to suggest that the individual is really in the grave and really in heaven. This is not stated in terms of soul-body separation but as though the departed were fully in both places simultaneously. This, of course, is a very crass form of dualism

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>17</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XIV, 71.

<sup>18</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 426.



and certainly not what is meant by the teaching of the dichotomy. Passages which seem to speak in this manner are as follows:

As we are about to commit the mortal remains of our dear sister, asleep in Jesus, to God's acre. . . may we do so secure in the heavenly knowledge that she is not dead but sleeps. How comforting the thought that someday, when we travel through the dark valley of the shadow of death and arrive safely at the gates of heaven, we shall find that sweet and lovely smile of our sainted sister, so dear to us here on earth, welcoming us to the realm of the saints.<sup>19</sup>

Now he lies buried in a foreign grave, where he will sleep through the dark years ahead. But it will not be his permanent home; it will be merely a hyphen between his temporal home and his eternal home. . . . The Savior loved him and took him home. Once you were proud of him in his new uniform. He wears another now, the heavenly robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. He is in another army now, God's army of saints in heaven.<sup>20</sup>

The first of these two selections has the departed sleeping in the grave and awaiting her loved ones in heaven. No doubt a dichotomy is meant here but it is certainly unclear. In the second selection the ambiguity is even more pronounced. The grave is spoken of as the home of the deceased and it is also said that the Savior has taken him home.

The next quotation is another example of a very ambiguous statement. The major emphasis in the entire sermon is that death is but a sleep for the Christian. The individual is clearly thought to be resting in the grave until the Last Day.

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<sup>19</sup>Bifert, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>20</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XV, 319.



However, perhaps not to be thought to be supporting the theory of soul sleep, the author inserts a small section stating that the soul is not unconscious. This is in such marked contrast to the rest of the sermon that it makes it very difficult to determine just what the author is really trying to say about the status intermedius. A portion of this sermon is as follows:

What is the Christian view of death? Death is but a sleep for those who believe the promises concerning Jesus Christ, for those who look to Christ as their Mediator and Redeemer. Those who have died in the Christian faith are only sleeping. . . . Death is but a sleep for us Christians. It brings the troubles and griefs of this earthly life to an end. . . . For in the sleep of death there is no pain, neither sorrow nor crying; for God wipes away all tears from their eyes. There is complete peace and rest. . . . Some have asserted that in death the Christian's soul is in a state of unconsciousness, experiencing nothing. But that cannot be the case when we consider the word of Jesus to the malefactor on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." . . . Death is the way by which we enter into full fellowship with Christ. And this is a glorious experience! . . . When he closes his eyelids in death, he knows and is confident that the morning will come; it will come on the Last Day, when the Son of Man shall return in glory. . . . Just as sleeping soldiers are summoned from their beds by the trumpet call, so shall the sound of the trump of God and the voice of the archangel summon the dead in Christ from sleep in their graves.<sup>21</sup>

The final group of selections which will be presented in this chapter are those which speak of the activity of the soul after death. These passages generally attribute to the soul the activity of singing praises to God which is a very real activity. Various passages of this type are the following:

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<sup>21</sup>Eifert, op. cit., p. 145.



She is now according to her soul in the kingdom of God, in the kingdom of Glory. There she is safe from all temptations of Satan, world, and flesh; there she is with Jesus and all the holy angels, praising the Lamb that was slain for her from the foundations of the world. . . . Oh, then, think of her amid the heavenly host around the throne.<sup>22</sup>

For death to the Christian means a birthday in heaven, where the redeemed of all ages join the angels and archangels, the seraphim and cherubim, in chanting the eternal praise of God the Father, who created our body and soul, of God the Son, who redeemed us, and of God the Holy Spirit, who sanctified us as His own.<sup>23</sup>

And so our friend exclaims as she, united and herself, transfigured with God's saints, speaks and sings with them of the wonders of His redeeming love, which has assured for her this blessedness.<sup>24</sup>

A final selection asks the bereaved to "Consider with what rapture he, together with the saints, is singing the praises of his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier."<sup>25</sup>

To arrive at a complete picture of what is taught about the activity of the soul after death the reader should recall those passages which have already been listed in another context which speak of the status intermedius as a sleep, or rest, or simply being with Christ. These passages contrast rather sharply with those above which speak of the soul enjoying great activity during this time.

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<sup>22</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, XIV, 323.

<sup>23</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 445.

<sup>24</sup>Hifert, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>25</sup>The Concordia Pulpit, IX, 415.



This concludes the study of various sermonic statements of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the status intermedius. It will be noted that there is a greater difference of expression among these formulations than was apparent among the previously studied material. More ambiguity and lack of clarity is also prevalent. The trend is definitely away from the cautious and conservative dogmatic formulations.



## CHAPTER V

### HYMNOLOGICAL STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE STATUS INTERMEDIUS

In discussing the hymnology of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod with respect to the status intermedius it must be admitted that very few of the hymns in the Lutheran Hymnal were written by members of the Synod. Many of the hymns do not even have a Lutheran background. The hymns come from various periods in the history of the Church and bear the marks of those periods. For example the hymns of the Pietistic period are often much more subjective and sentimental than the hymns of the early Reformation period. However, these compositions are worth studying for two major reasons. First because they were chosen to be part of the hymnal of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and therefore presumably are thought to reflect at least the general thought of the Synod. The second reason is of perhaps greater importance. The normative influence of these hymns cannot be ignored. When one considers the use of these compositions in both public and private worship, their importance becomes apparent. To many individuals hymns are a very important teaching device. Therefore the expressions of the hymnology of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the status intermedius are a significant factor in determining the current thought of the Synod on this subject.



The same trends will be noted in the hymnological expressions concerning the state of the believer between death and the Last Day as were evidenced in the previous chapters. The hymns in general tend to depart even more from the conservative dogmatic formulations. Perhaps this can be attributed to their poetic nature and also to the fact that they are often very subjective and sentimental. Some of the hymns seem to contain views on the status intermedius which are mutually exclusive. Many of them are marked by considerable ambiguity and lack of clarity.

In these hymns the classic view of the separation of soul and body with the body remaining in the grave and the soul going to heaven is expressed. In the hymn "O God, Thou Faithful God" is this stanza:

Let me depart this life  
 Confiding in my Savior;  
 Do Thou my soul receive  
 That it may live forever;  
 And let my body have  
 A quiet resting place  
 Within a Christian grave;  
 And let it sleep in peace.<sup>1</sup>

The hymn "This Body in the Grave We Lay" also expresses this same thought:

This body in the grave we lay  
 There to await that solemn Day  
 When God Himself shall bid it rise  
 To mount triumphant to the skies.

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<sup>1</sup>The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1941), No. 395.



The soul forever lives with God,  
 Who freely hath His grace bestowed  
 And through His Son redeemed it here  
 From every sin, from every fear.<sup>2</sup>

The next group of selections seems to express the thought that the individual per se is in heaven. These hymns do not speak in terms of soul and body. That which has gone to heaven is the real individual. In the following stanza from the hymn "It Is Not Death to Die" a deprecation of the worth of the body is apparent:

It is not death to fling  
 Aside this sinful dust  
 And rise on strong, exulting wing,  
 To live among the just.<sup>3</sup>

The hymn "My Course Is Run, Praise God, My Course Is Run" expresses this thought that the individual per se is in heaven:

With heaven's bread the Lord will me now feed,  
 High honors on me shed.  
 Now I will hear the angels singing  
 Sweet songs of seraphim are ringing,  
 My course is run, My course is run.<sup>4</sup>

"A Pilgrim and a Stranger" has the same idea:

There still my thoughts are dwelling  
 'Tis there I long to be;  
 Come, Lord, and call Thy servant  
 To blessedness with Thee.  
 Come, bid my toils be ended,  
 Let all my wanderings cease;  
 Call from the wayside lodging  
 To Thy sweet home of peace.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., No. 596.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., No. 602.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., No. 599.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., No. 586.



One stanza of the hymn "For Me to Live Is Jesus" also seems to indicate the belief that the individual is in heaven:

For Christ, my Lord and Brother,  
I leave this world so dim  
And gladly seek the other  
Where I shall be with Him.<sup>6</sup>

"The Saints on Earth and Those Above" expresses this same thought:

Lo, thousands to their endless home  
Are swiftly borne away;  
And we are to the margin come  
And soon must launch as they.

Lord Jesus, be our constant Guide;  
Then, when the word is given,  
Bid death's cold flood its waves divide  
And land us safe in heaven.<sup>7</sup>

The hymn "Jesus Sinners Doth Receive" makes this statement,

"And when I this earth must leave, I shall find an open heaven."<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein is one of the stanzas of "Lord, Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing":

So whene'er the signal's given  
Us from earth to call away,  
Borne on angel's wings to heaven,  
Glad the summons to obey,  
May we ever, May we ever,  
Reign with Christ in endless day.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., No. 597.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., No. 478.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., No. 324.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., No. 50.



This same thought is apparent in the hymn "I Know My Faith Is Founded":

And then at my departure  
Take Thou me home to Thee  
And let me there inherit  
All Thou hast promised me.<sup>10</sup>

The final example of this type of expression is taken from the hymn "Now That the Day Hath Reached Its Close" in which one of the stanzas prays:

Should this night prove the last for me  
In this sad vale of cares,  
Then lead me, Lord to dwell with Thee  
And all Thy chosen heirs.<sup>11</sup>

The next group of selections seems to say almost the opposite of what the above hymns express. These compositions appear to believe that the individual per se is really in the grave awaiting the Last Day to rise to life. It will be remembered that this same thought appeared in the previous chapter.

The hymns which speak of Judgment Day often tend to this type of expression. One of the stanzas of "That Day of Wrath, That Dreadful Day" is an example of this type of thought:

Lord, on that day, that wrathful day,  
When man to Judgment wakes from clay,  
Be Thou the trembling sinner's stay  
Though heaven and earth shall pass away.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., No. 381.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., No. 561.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., No. 612.



Another hymn which speaks of man waking at Judgment Day is "Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning", "Day of sorrow, day of weeping, When in the dust no longer sleeping, Man awakes in Thy dread keeping."<sup>13</sup>

A very interesting selection is one of the stanzas of the hymn "Great God, What Do I See and Hear?" In this composition the soul is also mentioned as though awaiting this Last Day instead of as being with Christ immediately after death:

The dead in Christ shall first arise  
At that last trumpet's sounding,  
Caught up to meet Him in the skies  
With joy their Lord surrounding.  
No gloomy fears their souls dismay;  
His presence sheds eternal day  
On those prepared to meet Him.<sup>14</sup>

The hymn "I Would Not Live Alike, I Ask Not to Stay" speaks as though the individual is resting in the grave:

I would not live alike; no, welcome the tomb;  
Since Jesus hath lain there, I dread not its gloom.  
There sweet be my rest till He bids me arise  
To hail Him in triumph descending the skies.<sup>15</sup>

The familiar hymn "Asleep in Jesus! Blessed Sleep" is a good example of this type of thought:

Asleep in Jesus! Peaceful rest,  
Whose waking is supremely blest;  
No fear, no woe, shall dim that hour  
That manifests the Savior's power.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., No. 607.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., No. 604.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., No. 588.



Asleep in Jesus! Oh, for me  
 May such a blissful refuge be!  
 Securely shall my ashes lie  
 And wait the summons from on high.<sup>16</sup>

One of the stanzas of the hymn "Awake, My Soul, And With the Sun" contains an expression which suggests the thought that eternal life doesn't begin for the individual until the Last Day, "Grant, Lord, when I from death shall wake, I may of endless life partake."<sup>17</sup> Another hymn in this same vein, "The Old Year Now Hath Passed Away," clearly gives the impression that activity for the individual does not begin until after Judgment Day:

To rise again when Thou shalt come  
 And enter Thine eternal home.

There shall we thank Thee and adore  
 With all the angels evermore.<sup>18</sup>

Several more hymns speak of waking from the dead on the Last Day. One of the stanzas of the hymn "From God Shall Naught Divide Me" is an example of this type of thought:

But though in death they make  
 The deepest grave our cover,  
 When there our sleep is over,  
 Our God will us awake.<sup>19</sup>

A similar hymn is "Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense":

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., No. 587.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., No. 536.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., No. 125.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., No. 393.



I am flesh and must return  
 Unto dust, whence I am taken;  
 But by faith I now discern  
 That from death I shall awaken  
 With my Savior to abide  
 In His glory, at His side.

Then these eyes my Lord shall know,  
 My Redeemer and my brother;  
 In His love my soul shall glow,  
 I myself, and not another!<sup>20</sup>

Another example of this type of expression is one of the stanzas of the hymn "O God, Thou Faithful God":

And on that solemn Day  
 When all the dead are waking,  
 Stretch o'er my grave Thy hand,  
 Thyself my slumbers breaking.  
 Then let me hear Thy voice,  
 Change Thou this earthly frame,  
 And bid me aye rejoice  
 With those who love Thy name.<sup>21</sup>

A similar type of expression is found in the hymn "I Am Content! My Jesus Liveth Still":

I am content! Lord, draw me unto Thee  
 And wake me from the dead.  
 That I may rise forevermore to be  
 With Thee, my living Head.  
 The fetters of my body sever,  
 Then shall my soul rejoice forever.  
 I am content! I am content!<sup>22</sup>

The fact that the soul will not rejoice until after Christ wakes the individual from the dead is very interesting.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., No. 206.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., No. 395.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., No. 196.

<sup>23</sup>The hymn is ambiguous but this seems to be the point.



There are several hymns which are very ambiguous as to whether the individual is per se in heaven or in the grave. They seem to suggest that the departed is really in both places. Here, as in similar sections of the previous chapters, there appears to be a dualistic type of thinking.

In the hymn "Oh, Sing With Exultation" the individual is said to rise to God and also to be in the grave:

Since Christ, our Lord, is living,  
 We nevermore shall die;  
 To God the glory giving,  
 We rise to Him on high.  
 Tho' chastened we may be  
 And to our graves be taken,  
 We unto life shall waken  
 And live eternally.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly the hymn "Lord, Thee I Will Love With All My Heart" speaks as though the individual is at home with God but will not see the Savior's face until awakened from the grave:

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,  
 To Abram's bosom bear me home,  
 That I may die unfearing;  
 And in its narrow-chamber keep  
 My body safe in peaceful sleep  
 Until Thy reappearing.  
 And then from death awaken me  
 That these mine eyes joy may see,  
 O Son of God, Thy glorious face,  
 My Savior and my Fount of grace.<sup>25</sup>

The hymn "Tender Shepherd Thou Hast Stilled" expresses the thought that the child is both in heaven and in the grave:

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., No. 217.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., No. 429.



Tender Shepherd, Thou hast stilled  
 Now Thy little lamb's brief weeping.  
 Ah, how peaceful and how mild  
 In its narrow bed 'tis sleeping!  
 And no sign of anguish sore  
 Heaves that little bosom more.

In this world of pain and care,  
 Lord, Thou would'st no longer leave it;  
 To Thy heavenly pastures fair  
 Lovingly Thou dost receive it.  
 Clothed in robes of spotless white  
 Now it dwells with Thee in light.

O, Lord Jesus, grant that we  
 There may live where it is living,  
 There the blissful pastures see  
 That it heavenly food are giving.  
 Lost a while our treasured love,  
 Gained forever, safe above.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein are the expressions of the hymn "Why Do We  
 Mourn Departing Friends?":

Why do we mourn departing friends  
 Or shake at death's alarms?  
 'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends  
 To call them to His arms.

The graves of all the saints He blessed  
 And softened every bed.  
 Where should the dying members rest  
 But with their dying Head?

Thence He arose, ascending high,  
 And showed our feet the way.  
 Up to the Lord we, too, shall fly  
 At the great rising day.

Then let the last loud trumpet sound  
 And bid our kindred rise:  
 Awake, ye nations under ground!  
 Ye saints, ascend the skies.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., No. 595.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., No. 593.



The hymn "Oh, How Blest Are Ye Whose Toils Are Ended" also says that the departed has ascended into heaven and is still in the grave:

Oh, how blest are ye whose toils are ended,  
Who through death have unto God ascended!

Ye meanwhile are in your chambers sleeping,  
Quiet and set free from weeping.

Christ has wiped away your tears forever;  
Ye have that for which we still endeavor;  
To you are chanted  
Songs that ne'er to mortal ears were granted.<sup>28</sup>

A hymn which seems to present this dualistic type of thought very well is "I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name." This hymn speaks in terms of body and soul with both really referred to as the individual:

I know of a sleep in Jesus' name,  
A rest from all toil and sorrow;  
Earth folds in her arms my weary frame  
And shelters it till the morrow;  
My soul is at home with God in heaven,  
Her sorrows are past and over.

I know of a morning bright and fair  
When tidings of joy shall wake us.  
When songs from on high shall fill the air  
And God to His glory take us.  
When Jesus shall bid us rise from sleep,  
How joyous that hour of waking.

God's Son to our graves then takes His way,  
His voice hear all tribes and nations;  
The portals are rent that guard our clay,  
And moved are the sea's foundations.  
He calls out aloud: "Ye dead, come forth!"  
In glory we rise to meet Him.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., No. 589.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., No. 592.



The final section of this chapter deals with those selections which speak of the activity of the soul. Several hymns ascribe considerable activity to the departed. Usually this is expressed in some type of giving praise to God in song. The hymn "Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care" is a good example of this type of thought:

Then shall I end my sad complaints  
 And weary sinful days  
 And join with the triumphant saints  
 That sing my Savior's praise.<sup>30</sup>

A similar thought is expressed in the hymn "All Men Living Are But Mortal":

There is a joy beyond our telling,  
 Where so many saints have gone;  
 Thousands, thousands, there are dwelling,  
 Worshipping before the throne,  
 There the seraphim are shining,  
 Evermore in chorus joining:  
 "Holy, holy, holy, Lord!  
 Triune God, for aye adored!"

Patriarchs of sacred story  
 And the prophets there are found;  
 The apostles, too, in glory  
 On twelve seats are there enthroned.  
 All the saints that have ascended  
 Age on age, through time extended,  
 There in blissful concert sing  
 Hallelujahs to their King.

Yea, I see what here was told me,  
 See that wondrous glory shine,  
 Feel the spotless robes enfold me,  
 Know a golden crown is mine.  
 Thus before the throne so glorious  
 Now I stand a soul victorious,  
 Gazing on that joy for aye  
 That shall never pass away.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., No. 148.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., No. 601.



A final hymn which attributes considerable activity to the departed is "Awake, My Soul, To Joyful Lays":

Then shall I mount and soar away  
To the bright world of endless day,  
And sing with rapture and surprise  
His loving kindness in the skies.<sup>32</sup>

There are a number of hymns which speak of the soul as though it were enjoying very little activity in heaven. Usually the expression is that the soul is at rest. Such a hymn is "I'm But a Stranger Here":

There are the good and blest,  
Those I love most and best;  
And there I, too, shall rest,  
Heav'n is my home.<sup>33</sup>

Another example is part of the hymn "Jesus, I Live To Thee":

Whether to live or die  
I know not what is best;  
To live in Thee is bliss to me,  
To die is endless rest.<sup>34</sup>

This, then, concludes the material on the status intermedius from the Lutheran Hymnal. In general it can be noted that there is probably a greater departure in these selections from the conservative position than in any other chapter. The amount of ambiguity and lack of clarity is also more prevalent in these hymns.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., No. 34.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., No. 660.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., No. 591.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The teaching of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the status intermedius can be summarized under the following points:

The soul is with God while the body remains in the grave until it will be reunited with the soul at the Last Day. No evidence in any of the sources studied would contradict the general acceptance of this statement. This much can be considered a basic belief.

However, differences do seem to occur as to just where the individual per se is during the status intermedius. One group of evidence appears to consider the essential individual to be in heaven. This probably follows from the thought that the soul is the essential part of the person--that what makes him what he is. The worth of the body is not denied but it is not thought to be really and essentially the individual.

Another group of evidence seems to regard the individual per se as really being in the grave. This may be attributed to the sentimental thought that what was commonly known to be the individual is lying in the grave. These passages would probably not deny that the soul is with Jesus but would say that it is more the thought that the soul is in the hand of God--in His safe-keeping. Both body and soul would then be



thought to be awaiting the Last Day when they would enter into full enjoyment of the beatific vision.

Yet another group of evidence appears to be quite dualistic in its view. These passages seem to regard the individual as being essentially in heaven and essentially in the grave. Thus such a statement could be made "John is in heaven and John is in the grave."

The other significant aspect of the teaching on the status intermedius concerns the activity of the individual after death.

Here there are two differing opinions. The majority view is that the soul is enjoying considerable activity in heaven. It is singing and praising God, serving Him, waiting for loved ones, and so forth.

The other opinion, largely supported by the dogmatic formulations, is that it is not possible to define the activity of the soul after death. The dogmatic formulations will only say that the soul enjoys God. Most of the other evidence speaks in terms of the soul as resting.

This in brief summary is the teaching of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the status intermedius.

In studying this material the author has arrived at some personal conclusions which may be of interest to the reader.

It seems clear that there is a marked amount of ambiguity and lack of clarity in various areas of the teaching of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the subject of the status intermedius. The author believes the evidence supports this



conclusion. In the same hymn or sermon almost opposite views seem to appear. This cannot but lead to a confusion about this doctrine especially among the laity. It is evident that more care should be taken in formulating expressions on this subject whether they appear in the liturgy, sermons, prayers, or hymns of the Church. All ambiguity should be avoided. It should be able to be clearly determined exactly what each formulation is stating about the status intermedius.

This tendency toward ambiguity and lack of clarity can be attributed to many factors. The most serious cause is that many of the formulations go beyond what Scripture specifically states on this subject. This tendency can be noted in certain developments of the doctrine of the dichotomy which state more than Scripture definitely says on this matter.<sup>1</sup> It is also apparent in attempts to comfort the bereaved by stating information about the activity of the departed which is clearly unwarranted by Scripture.

Closely allied to this cause is the sentimental character of death and the funeral. This atmosphere seems to lend itself to the production of statements which are of very dubious worth. An example of such a non-Scriptural, sentimental approach is recalled from the author's personal experience. At the death of a young cousin the pastor comforted the mourners by giving this reason for the death of the boy. He stated

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<sup>1</sup>Specific reference is to those formulations which use this doctrine in a crass dualistic sense.



that one day God was walking in His garden gathering a bouquet of roses. God had gathered a large, beautiful bouquet but He found that one more perfect rose-bud was needed to complete it. And so God took the child to heaven to complete the bouquet. While this is undoubtedly a beautiful thought, it certainly is not the best way to describe the death of a child of God. Until rather recently it was also often stated that God called a child home to heaven because He needed another angel. This, of course, is clearly unscriptural. Sentimentality should never be permitted to becloud the blessed truth about the death of the believer. A Christian dies because his mission and pilgrimage here on earth are completed.

It might be argued that much of the difference of thought, ambiguity of expression, and lack of clarity can simply be attributed to the fact that this is the common and popular way to speak about death. Even if this were the only reason, would such ambiguity and lack of clarity then be justified? Certainly the Church should always strive to state the truth as clearly as it is able no matter what the popular mode of expression may be.

Would it not be more Scriptural and clear simply to say that at the death of a Christian he is with God--that his body is placed in the ground from whence it came and that it will be restored to the individual at the Last Day? There are no doubt other ways to express the truth about the death of a believer but it seems to the author that this one avoids many



of the dualistic and ambiguous expressions that are all too common in speaking about this subject.

Eventually it must be confessed with the hymn writer:

My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The Lutheran Hymnal, authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1941), No. 527.



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