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Martin Luther's Views on the State of the Dead

PHILIP J. SECKER

In 1765 the Anglican theologian Francis Blackburne asserted that Blessed Martin Luther

espoused the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, upon a scriptural foundation, and then he made use of it as a confutation of purgatory and saint worship, and continued in that belief to the last moment of his life.¹

Two hundred years later, in 1965, an-

¹ Francis Blackburne, *A Short Historical View of the Controversy concerning an Intermediate State and the Separate Existence of the Soul between Death and the General Resurrection Deduced from the Beginning of the Protestant Reformation to the Present Time* (London: printed for F. Field, 1765), p. 14. As cited in LeRoy Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, II* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), 74. It was not possible in the present study to investigate the influence of Luther's rejection of purgatory and "saint worship" on his teaching about the state of the dead between death and the Last Day. For some of Luther's statements on purgatory, see: *Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Herman Böhlau's Nachfolger, 1883—), 1, 555 ff.; 7, 348 f., 454, 18—19; 12, 596, 33—39; 20, 162 f.; 30 II, 367—90; 31, 125 ff., 141, 130; 50, 204 ff. Hereafter this work will be cited as WA followed by the volume, page, and line number. See also *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955—), 31, 125 ff. 130. 141; 32, 31. 98; 35, 98, note 33. Hereafter this work will be cited as AE plus volume and page number.

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other book was published that makes a very similar statement about the Reformer:

He stated many times that the Christian dead are unaware of anything, for they see not, feel not, understand not. They are asleep, oblivious of all passing events. More than one hundred times, scattered over the years, Luther declared death to be a sleep, and repeatedly asserted that in death there is total unconsciousness, and consequent unawareness of the passage of time. He presses the point that death is a sound, sweet sleep. And furthermore, the dead will remain asleep until the day of resurrection, which resurrection embraces both body and soul, when both will be brought together again.²

In the intervening years statements at least partially in line with the above assertions have been made by Lutherans. For

² Froom, pp. 76—77. Cf. also Froom's article, "The Mystery of Life," *Signs of the Times*, XCIII (February 1965), 18—20. The unpublished master of arts thesis that Froom cites in support of his assertions draws a conclusion which is quite different from Froom's: "Although Luther sometimes expressed opinions in favor of the unconscious state of the dead and placed their punishment or reward after the last judgment, the main bulk of his teaching indicates that he believed in the conscious state of the dead and its attendant immediate punishment or reward. As a rule, he considered the righteous dead as being in a place of reward and the ungodly dead as being in a place of punishment although he plainly taught that it can be neither real hell or [sic] purgatory" (Toivo Nikolai Ketola, *A Study of Martin Luther's Teaching Concerning the State of the Dead* [A master of arts thesis presented to the faculty of the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary, Takoma Park, Washington, D. C., January 1956], p. 25; emphasis not original).

example, Francis Pieper wrote in his *Christliche Dogmatik*: "A sleep of the soul which includes enjoyment of God (thus Luther) cannot be called a false doctrine."³ Another Lutheran, Taito Almar Kantonen, asserted in his book *The Christian Hope* that "in Luther's view, so far as the dead person himself is concerned, the intermediate state is reduced to an unconscious moment."⁴ Other Lutherans, while presenting a more balanced assessment of Luther's position, still fail to do justice to the diversity of Luther's thought on the state of the dead.⁵

Did Luther teach that the dead sleep until the Last Day? This study seeks to answer that question on the basis of Luther's own statements made between 1517

and the year of his death. An attempt is made to present representative statements of Luther throughout those years, with additional references in the footnotes, so that the reader can evaluate for himself the conclusion of this study that Luther was not wholly consistent in his teachings about the state of the dead.

I

There can be no denying that Luther frequently and throughout the course of his life as a Reformer referred to death as sleep. Indeed this may well have been the characteristic way in which he referred to death.⁶

³ "Ein Seelenschlaf, der ein Geniessen Gottes einschliesst (so Luther), ist nicht als irrigte Lehre zu bezeichnen." Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920), 575. In the footnote Pieper cites *Luthers Werke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881—1910), I, 1758 ff.; II, 215 ff. Hereafter this work will be cited as W² plus volume and page number. An investigation of these passages (WA 43, 359 ff./AE 4, 311—13; WA 43, 480 f.) indicates that Pieper is drawing a conclusion from Luther's statements rather than quoting or paraphrasing them.

⁴ Taito Almar Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1954), p. 38.

⁵ Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962), pp. 346 to 347. Howard Tepker, "Problems in Eschatology: The Nature of Death and the Intermediate State," *The Springfielder*, XXIX (1965), 25. John Gerhard listed seven arguments or quotations from Luther against the charge that Luther had taught soul sleep; *Loci Theologici*, *Locus de Morte*, para. 305, ed Eduard Preuss, VIII (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1869), 241 to 242. See also Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), pp. 98—101.

⁶ Luther also says repeatedly that the dead are "alive." Cf. WA 17 II, 236, 1—2; 31, 151—57/AE 14, 86—88; WA 36, 259, 19/AE 51, 246; WA 38, 505, 29—34; 42, 633, 10/AE 3, 119; WA 42, 634, 3/AE 3, 120; WA 43, 221, 30—34/AE 4, 119 f.; WA 43, 222, 17—18/AE 4, 120; WA 43, 359, 37—38/AE 4, 312; WA 43, 362, 25—26/AE 4, 316; WA 43, 480 f.; WA 47, 435, 13—15; WA BR V, 273, 24/Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), "Library of Christian Classics," XVIII, 61 (hereafter this work will be cited LCC followed by the volume and page number); WA TR 1, No. 987, 500, 5; 2, No. 2491, 486, 14; 5, No. 5534, 219, 9—17; W² 8, 421; etc. Quistorp argues on the basis of WA TR 5, No. 5534, that Luther "does not mean that the soul lives while the body is dead" (pp. 100—101). Luther also frequently asserts that the dead are "resting" or in a state of "rest": WA 5, 309, 28—30; WA 17 I, 203, 17; WA 12, 456, 27—30; WA 36, 216, 37/AE 51, 248; WA 42, 67, 38—40/AE 1, 89; WA 42, 576, 17—18/AE 3, 39; WA 43, 277, 36—37/AE 4, 197; WA 43, 278, 7—13/AE 4, 197; WA 43, 359, 1—4/AE 4, 311; WA 43, 359, 42—360, 1/AE 4, 329; WA 44, 517, 23—25; 518, 9—11; 811, 23; WA BR 5, No. 1529, 240, 28—70; etc. As John Gerhard suggested (*op. cit.*, p. 241), Luther's frequent reference to death as "sleep" may be largely due to the frequency with which this metaphor for death occurs in the Sacred

Many of these references contain indications that Luther may be using the word sleep in a euphemistic or metaphorical sense.⁷ Sometimes Luther as much as says that the description is euphemistic, as for example in his comment on Gen. 15:15:

Above all one should note the very pleasing description of death this passage contains. God does not use the term "death." No, He tones down this name, so to speak, with pleasing words. "You will be gathered to your fathers," He says, "and will sleep with Noah and other heroes."⁸

In a great many cases Luther uses the description of death as sleep in combination with other words which are clearly metaphorical. Perhaps the most famous illustration of this is his statement: "We shall sleep, until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, Doctor Martin,

Scriptures: Deut. 31:16; 1 Kings 1:21; 2:10; 11:21, 43; 14:20, 31; 15:8, 24; 16:6, 28; 22:40, 50; 2 Kings 8:24; 10:35; 13:9, 14; 14:16, 22, 29; 15:7, 22, 38; 16:20; 20:21; 21:18; 24:6; 2 Chron. 9:31; 12:16; 14:1; 16:13; 21:1; 26:2, 23; 27:9; 28:27; 32:33; 33:20; Job 3:13; 14:12; Ps. 13:3; Jer. 51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 9:24, cf. 25:5; 27:52; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60, 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; Eph. 5:14; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14, 15; 5:10; 2 Peter 3:4.

⁷ It is of interest to note that Luther could also use sleep as a metaphor for life: "Vere itaque somnus et somnium est vita nostra." *Enarratio Psalmi XC*, 1534/35, WA 40 III, 528, 25/AE 13, 102. "Quid enim sunt duo aut tres anni, quos dormiendo pene fallimus, collati ad aeternitatem?" *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 3:19, 1536, WA 42, 160, 5—6/AE 1, 214.

⁸ "Ac notanda in primis hoc in loco est descriptio mortis suavissima: Non appellat mortem, sed suavibus verbis eam quasi extenuat: 'Colligeris, inquit, ad Patres tuos', et dormies cum Noah atque aliis heroibus." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 15:13—16, 1536/39? WA 42, 576, 19—21. Translation from AE 3, 39. Cf. WA BR 6, No. 1930, 301, 20—21/LCC 18, 65.

get up! Then I shall rise in a moment and be happy with Him forever."⁹ Other passages containing words that are clearly metaphorical include those in which Luther says that the dead sleep in their beds,¹⁰ in their sleeping chambers,¹¹ in their dormitories,¹² in their sepulchers,¹³ in their graves,¹⁴ in a cradle,¹⁵ in God's hand,¹⁶

⁹ "Wir sollen schlaffen, donec veniat und klopf an das greblin et d[ic]at: D. Mart[ine], surge. Ibi in momento surgam und werde ewig mit ihm frolich sein." *Predigt*, Rörer's *Nachschrift*, 1533, WA 37, 151, 8—10.

¹⁰ *Cubile, lectulus, stratus, Kemerlein, Faul, Rugebette, Sanftbettlin. Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519—21, WA 5, 89, 30—32; *Predigt* (Cruciger's *Sommerpostille* of 1544), 1535, WA 22, 102, 1—2; *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 498, 15; Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1539*, TR 4, No. 449, 318, 6—14; recorder unknown, 1540, TR 5, No. 5356a, 84, 12; 85, 14; No. 5356b, 86, 4, 9; *Die Vorrede zu der Sammlung der Begräbnislieder*, 1542, WA 35, 478, 12—18/AE 53, 326; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 517, 20—22, 28—30/AE 7, 293—94.

¹¹ *Cubiculum. Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7—10, 1540?, WA 43, 360, 1, 14—15, 21—23/AE 4, 312, 313; on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 517, 20—23/AE 7, 293.

¹² *Koemiteria, κοιμητήριον, dormitorium, Schlafbeuser, Rugestete. Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 498, 12—16; *Die Vorrede zu der Sammlung der Begräbnislieder*, 1542, WA 35, 478, 28—30/AE 53, 326.

¹³ *Sepulchrum. Predigt*, Rörer's *Nachschrift*, 1545, WA 49, 732, 6-733, 1.

¹⁴ *Grab. Predigt*, printed edition, 1523, WA 12, 456, 27—30; *Die Vorrede zu der Sammlung der Begräbnislieder*, 1542, WA 35, 482, 8—10.

¹⁵ *Wigin, Wiegin*. Anton Lauterbach, date unknown, WA B5 5, No. 6445, 666, 6; *Predigt* (Cruciger's *Sommerpostille* of 1544), 1535, WA 22, 102, 1—2.

¹⁶ Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1539*, TR 4, No. 4449, 318, 6—14; Anton Lauterbach, date unknown, TR 5, No. 6445, 666, 6. Compare *Tischrede* (recorder not known), 1540, TR 5, No. 5356a, 85, 14.

in Abraham's bosom,¹⁷ or in Christ's bosom.¹⁸

In a great number of cases Luther does not say that death "is" sleep but, rather, that death "is called" sleep. In some of these passages he gives no further explanation.¹⁹ In others Luther goes on to explain that death is called sleep for believers because believers do not experience the terrors of death when they die²⁰ or because death has been overcome for them

¹⁷ *Predigt*, printed edition, 1522, WA 10 III, 192, 19 (cf. 191, 26—29)/*The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*, edited by John N. Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands, Company, 1904), 13, 27 (hereafter this work will be cited "Lenker" followed by the volume and page number); Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1539*, TR 4, No. 4449, 318, 6—14; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 2:8, 1535, WA 42, 67, 38—40/AE 1, 89; on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 517, 31—36.

¹⁸ *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, 1540?, WA 43, 359, 24—25/AE 4, 311; 361, 4 ff. 1/AE 4, 313; Letter to Justus Jonas, 1542, BR 10, No. 3829, 228, 43/LCC 18, 76; Rörer's *Hauspostille*, date uncertain, W² 13, 1741. Compare WA 35, 478, 12—18.

¹⁹ *Predigt*, Spalatin's printed edition of 1525, 1525, WA 17 I, 218, 1—2 (see the Wittenberg edition of 1539: WA 17 I, 209, 32; 220, 29—30); see *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1526, WA 20, 255, 9—11; 256, 1—4.

²⁰ "Es gibt auch die epistel nit allein solch starck lere und exempel des glawbens und der liebe, sondern auch trost und ermanung, leret nit allein, sondern reizt und treibt auch, inn dem das [sie] den todt einen schlaff nennet, da sich alle welt fur entsetzt. Aber hie spricht Lucas: Er ist entschlaffen, das ist: mit einem sanfften todt, den er nit gefulet hatt, von dannen gescheiden, gleich als ein mensch, wenn es einschlefft, weiss es nit, wie ihm geschicht, kompt inn den schlaff unempfindlich." *Predigt* (on Acts 6:8-14) (printed edition), 1522, WA 10 I, 1, 266, 10—16. "Sterben müssen wir und den todt laiden, aber das ist ein wunder, das, wer sich an Gottes wort helt, sol den todt nit fulen, sondern gleich wie in ainem schlaffe dahin faren, und nit mehr haissen: Ich sterbe, sonder: Ich muss schlaffen. Aber wer sich ausser dem wort finden lest, der muss mit engsten ster-

and has no power²¹ or because they will rise from the dead.²²

In many cases it is simply impossible to say whether Luther is using the term

ben." *Die Sammlung Khummer*, 1543, TR 4, No. 4835, 539, 9—14. See also: *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519—21, WA 5, 463, 22—25; *Predigt (Adventpostille)* (printed edition), 1522, WA 10 1—2, 43, 3—18; *Predigt (Fastenpostille)*, 1525, WA 17 II, 234, 36—235, 20; *Predigt (Festpostille)*, 1527, WA 17 II, 433, 9—19; *Predigt (Winterpostille)* (Roth), 1528, WA 21, 142, 32—34; 144, 1—4; *Predigt (Rörer's Nachschrift)*, 1533, WA 37, 20, 17—23 (see Dietrich's *Hauspostille*, 1544, WA 52, 202, 14—18); *Predigt (Cruciger's Sommerpostille)*, 1535, WA 22, 99, 34—101, 21/Lenker 9, 149—51; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 5:21-24, 1536?, WA 42, 256, 27—28, 35—37/AE 1, 349; *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 649, 5—9, 27—29; Letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, Oct. 29, 1542, WA BR 10, No. 3805, 169, 4—12. See "Myt frid und freud ich far do hyn" (Hymn), 1524?, WA 35, 438, 14-439, 2/AE 53, 248; *Predigt (Rörer's Nachschrift)*, 1526, WA 20, 255, 9—11; 256, 1—4; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 22:11, 1539?, WA 43, 218, 8—11/AE 4, 115; *Bibel- und Bucheinzeichnungen*, on John 8:51, 1542, WA 48, No. 203, 156, 3—7.

²¹ "Nisi [corporalis mortis] victrix gratia dei superetur, prorsus nihil differt ab aeterna morte, immo est vere initium aeternae mortis. Alioquin vix dormitio vocatur et somnus seu requies sanctorum." *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519—21, WA 5, 309, 28—30. See also *Tes-saradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus et oneratis*, 1520, WA 6, 123, 24—26; and *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 649, 5—9, 27—29.

²² "Er ist versamlet zu seinem volck . . . ist ein Ebreische weise zu reden und soviel gesagt, nicht wo er hin gefaren sei, sondern er ist komen zu den todtten, da sie begraben sind, wie wir auff unsere weise sagen: Er ist auff den kirchoff komen, Aber da ist heimlich die auff-erhebung von todtten angezeigt, das sie Gott widderümb wolle aufferwecken, Daher die schrift den todt auch einen schlaff heisset, Den die da schlaffen, haben die hoffnung, das sie widder sollen aufferstehen, Also auch sind die veter versamlet zu ihrem volck als auff die Gott ein auge hat und wil sie zu seiner zeit auff-erwecken." *Predigt* (1527 printed edition), 1523/24, WA 24, 706, 14—22. See also *Predigt*

"sleep" as a euphemism for death or whether he means that the dead are literally "asleep" until the resurrection. For example, Luther frequently referred to the death of a Christian by saying that the person in question had "fallen asleep" or "is asleep."²³

II

There are passages, however, in which Luther does seem to be saying that Christians who have died really and literally sleep until the Last Day. In a sermon preached in 1525 at the funeral of Elector Frederick of Saxony, Luther stated:

(Spalatin's printed edition of 1525), 1525, WA 17 I, 205, 2—4; 206, 7—10 (see the Wittenberg edition of 1539, WA 17 I, 205, 20—23); *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1532, WA 36, 547, 7—10 (see Cruciger's 1534 edition, lines 25—33); *Predigt* (Cruciger's *Sommerpostille*), 1544, WA 22, 402, 28—31/Lenker 14, 359; *Predigt* (Dietrich's edition of the 1544 *Hauspostille*), W² 13A, 1328. See *Operationes in Psalmos*, 1519—21, WA 5, 89, 29—35. See also Quistorp's comment: "Because the resurrection . . . occupies the central place in Luther's hope, the state of souls after death is for him of no importance. Hence he affirms with scripture that death has become a mere sleep." *Op. cit.*, pp. 98—99.

²³ *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523, WA 12, 457, 7—13; *Predigt* (printed edition), 1525, WA 17 I, 207, 36; 209; 211, 30, 36; 212, 6, 11; Letter, 1530, BR 5, No. 1584, 351, 24 to 25; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1532, WA 36, 248, 10—11/AE 51, 239; Letter to Philip Glüenspies, 1538, WA BR 8, No. 3255, 280, 6—7; *Tischrede*, 1539, W² 22, Cap. 48, No. 11, 1307; Letter to Philip Melancthon, 1541, WA BR 9, No. 3592, 358, 20—21; *Tischrede*, no date, WA TR 6, No. 6541, 31, 12—13; *Tischrede*, after Sept. 20, 1542, W² 22, Cap. 48, No. 9, 1304; Letter to Jacob Propst, 1542, WA BR 10, No. 3797, 156, 17—18; Letter to Anton Lauterbach, 1542, WA BR 10, No. 3807, 176, 7; *Predigt* (Cruciger's *Sommerpostille*), 1544, WA 22, 402, 25/Lenker 14, 359; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 48:21; 1545, WA 44, 719, 15 to 16/AE 8, 192; Letter to Catharine Metzler, 1539, WR BR 8, No. 3354, 485, 26—27/LCC 18, 73; Letter to Justus Jonas, 1542, WA BR 10, No. 3829, 227, 24/LCC 18, 76.

It is a comfort, that those who have acknowledged Christ here [on earth] are now sleeping. It is a sleep. Do not worry then, whether he [Frederick] also suffers pains or grieves as you do, for he rests and is quiet.²⁴

A year later Luther asserted about the dead: "I think that they are in such a sleep that they neither feel nor see anything."²⁵

In 1532 Luther declared that death is a sleep so deep that the dead do not even dream.²⁶ Three years later he said: "In the case of the godly a sweet sleep follows this disintegration of the body until we awake in a new and eternal life."²⁷

In 1537 Luther wrote: "It belongs to

²⁴ "Das ist ein trost, das die ihenigen, die da Christum erkant haben . . . schlaffen itzt. Es ist ein schlaffen, darffest nicht sorgen, das er auch schmerzen trage oder sich bekümere wie du, sondern ruget und schweigt." *Predigt* (Spalatin's printed edition), 1525, WA 17 I, 203, 13—17. (See the Wittenberg edition of 1539, WA 17 I, 204, 21—26.)

²⁵ "Ich aber wil hie lassen Lasarum und ander todtten faren und bei der schrift bleiben, die do sagt, sie schlaffen. Denn mich dünckt, das solcher schlaff habe sie so gar innen, das sie nichts fülen noch sehen, viel weniger denn man im natürlichen schlaffe fulet; Und wenn sie auf-erweckt werden, geschehe ihn, da sie nicht wissen, wo sie gewest sind." *Der Prophet Jona ausgelegt*, 1526, WA 19, 221, 24—28.

²⁶ "Sic cum omnibus, qui manent in filio: resurgent et vivent. Ideo non sollen heissen mortui, sed tantum obdormientes, und so tieff, ut non traum, das ein rechter schlaff." *Predigt* (Rörer's notes), 1532, WA 36, 252, 8—9 (printed edition, lines 31—32)/AE 51, 241 to 242. See Letter to Luther's father, 1530, WA BR 5, No. 1529, 240, 64—70/LCC 18, 32; Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Matthias Knudsen, 1531, WA BR 6, No. 1876, 213, 14—16/LCC 18, 61; *Annotationes in Ecclesiasten*, 1532, WA 20, 162, 27—163, 3.

²⁷ "Nunc mortem patitur corrupta haec natura. Eam corporis dissolutionem sequitur in piis suavissimus somnus, donec evigilabimus in novam et aeternam vitam." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 2:21, 1535, WA 42, 98, 1—3/AE 1, 130.

Christ's office to make light of death." Therefore He "lulls death to sleep" and "calls it sleep" and "wants us to know that for all who believe in Him death has really been changed and transformed into sleep."²⁸

The year before his own death, the account of Jacob's death in Genesis 49 elicited this comment:

I have often tried to observe the moment of time at which I either fall asleep or awaken, but I have never been able to detect it or to prevent sleep from coming upon me unexpectedly and before I thought it would. Our death and resurrection will also be like this. We depart, and we return on the Last Day, before we are aware of it. Nor do we know how long we have been away.²⁹

In regard to the statement of Gen. 49:33 that "Jacob . . . was gathered to his people," Luther said that "the people of God is without the suffering caused by longing,

²⁸ "Hoc proprie pertinet ad officium Christi, scilicet mortem extenuare Ita Christus sopit mortem. Ille vocat eam mortem, hic somnum Et vult nos scire omnibus credentibus in eum mortem esse sublatam et mutatam vere in somnum." *Conciunculae quaedam D. Mart. Lutheri amico quidam praescriptae*, 1537, WA 45, 458, 9—16. See *Tischreden* aus Clemen, 1540? WA TR 5, No. 6518, 278, 16—18; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:17, 1540? WA 43, 373, 27—31/AE 4, 329.

²⁹ "Saepe ego conatus sum observare momentum illud temporis quo aut obdormio, aut rursus evigilo, sed nunquam potui id deprehendere aut praevinire, quin somnus me occuparet praeter opinionem et cogitationem. Talis etiam erit mors et resurrectio nostra. Wir faren dahin, und kummen am jüngsten tag herwider, ehe wirs gewar werden, wissen auch nicht, wie lang wir auss gewesen sind." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 49:33, 1545, WA 44, 813, 42—814, 5/Translation from AE 8, 318. See *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7—10, 1540?, WA 43, 362, 32—36/AE 4, 316; and note 25 above.

and sleeps in most peaceful sleep and rest."³⁰

According to the 1539 Wittenberg edition of a sermon that Luther had preached in 1525, Luther asserted that the damned "fall asleep not through, but against Jesus."³¹ A 1525 edition of the same sermon, however, does not contain that phrase. Otherwise Luther does not appear to have taught that the damned fall asleep when they die nor to have asserted, without qualification, that they sleep until the Day of Judgment.

A number of Luther's other statements about the state of the dead harmonize with the teaching that the dead sleep until the Last Day. Thus he repeatedly said that the dead do not experience time, hours, days, or years.³² He frequently asserted that the time between a person's death and resur-

³⁰ "Sed populus ille Dei est sine passione desiderii, et dormit placidissimo somno et quiete, sicut Christus inquit: 'Non est mortua puella ista, vivit, quiescit, etc.'" *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 49:33, 1545, WA 44, 814, 10—12/Translation from AE 8, 319. Cf. WA 44, 811, 23—26/AE 8, 315. Cf. also Luther's use of the phrase "St. Michael's sleep" to refer to the sleep experienced by the dead prior to the moment when St. Michael blows his trumpet on the Last Day: *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1533, WA 37, 200, 3 (and the footnote); Dietrich's printed edition of the same sermon, *Hauspostille*, 1544, WA 52, 541, 38.

³¹ Unbelievers "entschlaffen nicht durch, sondern, wider Jhesus und sind verdampft." *Predigt* (Wittenberg edition of 1539), 1525, WA 17 I, 211, 36. (Spalatin's 1525 printed edition is printed above the Wittenberg edition.)

³² *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1523, WA 10 III, 194, 17/Lenker 13, 29; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1523, WA 11, 130, 25—29 (see the printed edition, WA 12, 596, 26—31); *Annotationes in Ecclesiasten*, 1532, WA 20, 162, 27—163, 3; *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 653, 38—653, 2; *Predigt* (Dietrich's *Hauspostille*), 1544, WA 52, 372, 3—7. Cf. WA 42, 370, 23—24/AE 2, 155; WA 45, 499, 3—4/AE 24, 42.

rection would appear to pass as quickly as a moment, a half hour, an hour, or a night of sleep.³³ On at least one occasion Luther said that the dead "know nothing."³⁴ On several occasions he said that the dead do not praise God.³⁵

³³ *Predigt* (Rörer's *Handschrift*), 1523, WA 11, 130, 25 (see the printed edition, WA 12, 596, 27—32); *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 194, 10—12/Lenker 13, 29; *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523—24, WA 14, 70, 14 to 19 (note 34, below); *Predigt* (*Fastenpostille*), 1525, WA 17 II, 235, 17 ff.; Letter to Luther's father, 1530, WA BR 5, No. 1529, 241, 82—87/LCC 18, 32; *Predigt* (Cruciger's edition of 1534), 1532, WA 36, 548, 23—25; 554, 32—36; *Tischrede*, Khumer, 1538, WA TR 4, No. 4203, 200, 9—201, 1; *Predigt in seinem Hause* (Rörer's 1559 edition), date uncertain, *Luthers Werke*, edited by Johann Georg Walch (Halle: Johann Gebauer, 1743) 13, 2263 (hereafter this work will be cited W¹ followed by the volume and page number). See *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7—10, 1540?, WA 43, 360, 31 to 33/AE 4, 313. Quistorp comments: "Because Luther sees death in such close connection with the general resurrection, the interval separating our end from the end of all things shrinks for him: between the day of our death and the last judgment lies only the short interval of our sleep, from which we shall be so joyfully awakened at the last that it will seem as though we had fallen asleep only yesterday. This interval stands for Luther wholly in the light of its utterly other dimension." (P. 101)

³⁴ "So stirbt nu der mensch, der leib wird begraben und verweset, liegt inn der erden und weis nichts, wenn aber der erst mensch am jungsten tag auff stehet, wird er meinen, er sei kaum eine stund da gelegen, da wird er sich umbsehen und gewar werden, das so viel leut von ihm geporen und nach ihm kommen sind, davon er nichts gewust hat." *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523/24, WA 14, 70, 14—19. Cf. *Tischrede*, Anton Lauterbachs *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1538*, WA TR 3, No. 3904, 697, 3—7.

³⁵ "'Denn inn dem tod gedenckt man dein nicht' [Ps. 6:5]. Das ist, die toden loben dich nicht, und preisen deine guete nicht, sondern allein die lebendigen, als im 114. psalm: 'Die toden werden dich, Herr, nicht loben . . .'" *Die sieben Busspsalmen*, 1525, WA 18, 482, 4—7/AE 14, 143. See also *Die sieben Busspsalmen*, 1517, WA 1, 161, 26—29.

III

In some of the quotations cited above, Luther's assertion that the dead are asleep appears to be unqualified. On occasion, however, he added some very important qualifications to this assertion. In a letter written Jan. 13, 1522, to Nicholas von Amsdorf, Luther wrote:

I am inclined to agree with your opinion that the souls of the just are asleep and that they do not know where they are up to the Day of Judgment. . . . But I do not dare to affirm that this is true for all souls in general, because of the taking up of Paul, of Elijah, and of Moses (who certainly did not appear as phantoms on Mount Tabor). Who knows how God deals with the separated souls? Can He just as well make them sleep on and off or for as long as He wished, just as he overcomes with sleep those who live in the flesh? And that passage in Luke 16 about Abraham and Lazarus—although it does not attribute sensation to all of the departed, yet it does attribute sensation to Abraham and Lazarus, and it is hard to twist this passage to refer to the Day of Judgment.

I think the same about those condemned; some may feel punishments immediately after death, but others may be spared until that Day. For the rich man confesses that he is tortured; and the Psalm says, "Evil will catch up with the unjust man when he perishes." You perhaps also refer this either to the Day of Judgment or to the passing anguish of physical death. Therefore, it is my opinion that these things are uncertain. It is most probable, however, that with few exceptions, all of the departed sleep without possessing any capacity of feeling. Consider now, who were the spirits in prison to whom (as St. Peter writes) Christ preached? Were they not

able to sleep in Him until the [Last] Day? ³⁶

In his comment on Gen. 25:7-10 in the Genesis lectures Luther said that the dead sleep in such a way that they are "awake":

Nevertheless, there is a difference between the sleep or rest of this life and that of the future life. For toward night a person who has become exhausted by his daily labor in this life enters into his chamber in peace, as it were, to sleep there; and during this night he enjoys rest and has no knowledge whatever of any evil caused either by fire or by murder. But the soul does not sleep in the same manner. It is awake. It experiences visions and the discourses of the angels and of God. Therefore the sleep in the future life is deeper than it is in this life. Nevertheless, the soul lives before God. With this analogy, which I have from the sleep of a living

³⁶ "Proclive mihi est concedere tecum in eam sententiam, iustorum animas dormire ac usque ad iudicii diem nescire, ubi sint . . . Sed an universale hoc sit omnibus animabus, non audeo asserere, propter raptum Pauli, Eliae et Moysi, qui utique non facti apparuerunt in monte Tabor. Quis enim novit, quomodo Deus agat cum animabus separatis? Nonne potest eas aequae sopire alternis vel quamdiu voluerit, atque viventes in carne sopit? Iam illud Lucae 16. de Abraham et Lasaro, etsi non urget universalem, tamen sensum tribuit Abrahae et Lasaro, et durum est hoc ad iudicii diem torquere.

"Idem de damnatis sentio: Posse aliquas sentire poenas statim a morte, aliquas vero separari usque in illum diem. Nam epulo cruciatum confitetur, et Psalmus dicit: 'Virum iniustum mala capient in interitu', nisi tu et hoc trahas ad diem iudicii, vel ad transeuntes mortis corporalis angustias. Igitur mea sententia est, incerta hae esse; verisimile autem, exceptis paucis omnes dormire insensibiles. Tu nunc vide, qui illi fuerint spiritus in carcere, quibus Petrus scribit per Christum esse praedicatum, annon et illi dormire in eum usque diem potuerint?" Letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, 1522, WA BR 2, 422, 4-6, 10-25/Translation from AE 48, 360-61, with a few changes.

person, I am satisfied; for in him there is peace and quiet. He thinks that he has slept barely one or two hours, and yet he sees that the soul sleeps in such a manner that it also is awake.³⁷

A number of times in his life Luther qualified the assertion that the dead are asleep by saying that this is not true of all of the dead. In the Genesis lectures he said that God is able to awaken the dead "whenever it is His good pleasure to do so"³⁸ and "so to control them that they live."³⁹

On at least three occasions Luther im-

³⁷ "Differunt tamen somnus sive quies huius vitae et futurae. Homo enim in hac vita defatigatus diurno labore, sub noctem intrat in cubiculum suum, tanquam in pace, ut ibi dormiat, et ea nocte fruitur quiete, neque quicquam scit de ullo malo sive incendii, sive caedis. Anima autem non sic dormit, sed vigilat, et patitur visiones, loquelas Angelorum et Dei. Ideo somnus in futura vita profundior est, quam in hac vita, et tamen anima coram Deo vivit. Hac similitudine, quam habeo a somno viventis hominis, contentus sum: In illo enim pax est et quies, putat se dormivisse vix unam aut a teram horam, et tamen videt animam ita dormire, ut etiam vigilet." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, 1540? WA 43, 360, 24-33/Translation from AE 4, 313.

³⁸ "Quia Moses et Helias cum Christo in monte colloquuntur [Matt. 17:3], unde apparet eum omnes istos sanctos habere in manu et potestate sua, et esse Deum ipsorum, Dormiunt vero et quiescunt, sicut de omnibus piis constat, ita ut possit eos Christus excitare, quandocunque ipsi libitum fuerit." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 519, 12-15/AE 7, 296.

³⁹ "Sic anima post mortem intrat suum cubiculum et pacem, et dormiens, non sentit suum somnum, et tamen servat Deus vigilantem animam. Ita potest Deus excitare Heliam, Mosen etc. et sic regere, ut vivant. Sed quomodo? Nescimus, sufficit similitudo somni corporalis, et quod Deus affirmat esse somnum, quietem et pacem." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, 1540? WA 43, 360, 34-38/AE 4, 313. (This passage immediately follows the one quoted in note 37 above.)

plied that the saints who rose with Christ are still in their resurrected state.⁴⁰

IV

A strong case can also be made for the contention that Luther did not teach that the dead sleep until Judgment Day. This is particularly true in the case of the ungodly but also in the case of believers.

Luther said a number of times that we do not know if the ungodly who die sleep until the Last Day.⁴¹ On several occasions he said that the rich man of Luke 16 suffered "in his conscience" after death and "had no rest."⁴² In 1538 Luther wrote

⁴⁰ "Alle Vetter fur Christus gepurt . . . entschlaffen, gefasset unnd bewaret als inn einem schoss, und schlaffen auch noch drinnen biss an den iungsten tag, und schlaffen die sso mit Christo sind schon auferstanden, wie Matthaeus schreibt am 27. Captitel, wo sie also blieben sind." *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 191, 24—29/Lenker 13, 27. *Predigt* (Rörer's *Abschrift*), 1525, WA 17 I, 78, 8—9. *Auslegung des Hosea* (Dietrich's 1545 edition), 1524, W² 6, 1124. See *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 7:1, 1536, WA 42, 322, 29—31/AE 2, 85—86.

⁴¹ *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 194, 17—19/Lenker 13, 29; *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523, WA 12, 596, 36—38 (This writer was unable to find a similar statement in Rörer's *Handschrift*, WA 11, 127—131); *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, 1540? WA 43, 361, 30—36/AE 4, 314—15; 362, 39/AE 4, 316; 363, 4—5/AE 4, 316; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 517, 31—36/AE 7, 294 (cf. 518, 9—11/AE 7, 294). See Letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, 1522, WA BR 2, 422, 10—25/AE 48, 361. (Note 36 above)

⁴² *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 192, 12—18, 28—29/Lenker 13, 27; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Handschrift*), 1523, WA 11, 130, 13—17 (cf. WA 12, 596, 10—16). See *Tessaradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus et oneratis*, 1520, WA 6, 122, 30—32; *Predigt* (*Fastenpostille*), 1525, WA 17 II, 235, 14; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 10:8-9, 1536/37?, WA 42, 400, 16—18/AE 2, 196; *Annotationes in*

that only Christians can say, "My sepulcher is my bed, my dormitory; I do not die, but sleep."⁴³ In the 1534 printed edition of a sermon preached 2 years earlier, Luther is reported to have said that those who lie in the earth without the hope of the resurrection are not called "sleepers," as departed Christians are called, but "dead bodies."⁴⁴

A case can also be made that Luther was not consistent in teaching that believers who have departed from this life sleep until the Last Day. In his comment on Gen. 26:24 in the Genesis lectures, Luther observed:

These things must be carefully noted: because it is divine truth that Abraham lives, serves, and reigns with God. But what sort of life that is, whether he is asleep or

aliquot capita Matthaei, 1538, WA 38, 653, 34—654, 3; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 42:38, 1544, WA 44, 517, 31—36/AE 7, 294; *Predigt* (Dietrich's 1544 *Hauspostille*), WA 52, 372, 3—7. But for a different interpretation see *Tischrede* (Dietrich's *Nachschriften*), 1533, WA TR 1, No. 591, 280, 35—36; *Tischrede* (Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1538*), WA TR 3, No. 3904, 696, 21—25.

⁴³ "Mors non est mors, sed dormitio apud Christianos, Imo locus sepulturae Christianorum vocatur κοιμητήριον, id est, dormitorium. Sic non possunt gentes appellare sua sepulchra, Soli Christiani dicunt: Sepulchrum meum est meus lectulus, meum dormitorium, Non morior, sed dormio." *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 489, 12—16.

⁴⁴ "Denn schlaffen heisset man die, die da ligen, das sie widder erwachen und auffstehen sollen, nicht die, die so ligen, das kein hoffnung ist, das sie widder auffstehen werden, welche heisset man nicht schlaffen, sondern todte leichnam. Also das eben inn dem wort 'schlaffen' in der schrift die zukünftige auferstehung angeben ist." *Predigt* (Cruciger's edition of 1534), 1532, WA 36, 547, 29—32. (This writer did not find a corresponding statement in Rörer's *Nachschrift*, WA 36, 547.)

awake, that is another question. How the soul rests, we are not to know.⁴⁵

A number of times between 1523 and the closing years of his life Luther stated that death is sleep to God but not to us⁴⁶ or that it is sleep to the eyes of faith.⁴⁷ His frequent statement that death is "like"

sleep carries with it the implication that there is a difference between the two.⁴⁸ The same can be said of Luther's admonition to Christians to "regard" their death as sleep⁴⁹ and of the proverbial saying—quoted a number of times by Luther—that "sleep is the brother of death."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ "Et diligenter ista sunt observanda: quia divina veritas est, quod Abraham vivit, servit et regnat cum Deo. Qualis vero illa vita sit, dormiatne, an vigilet, alia quaestio est: Quomodo est: Quomodo quiescat anima, nos non debemus scire." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 26:24-25, 1540/41? WA 43, 480, 11—15 (cf. 25—27). For other expressions of caution on the part of Luther in regard to making assertions about the state of the dead see his Letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, 1522, WA BR 2, 422, 12—13/AE 48, 313—14 (see note 36); *Predigt*, Rörer's *Handschrift*, 1523, WA 11, 130, 30—32 (see the printed edition, WA 12, 596, 36—38); *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 505, 29—34; Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1538*, WA TR 3, No. 3695, 540, 2—4; *Tischrede* (Heidenreich's *Nachschriften*), 1542/43, WA TR 5, No. 5534, 219, 3—8; *Genesis Vorlesung*, 1540—45, WA 43, 360, 17—23; 480, 13—15, 38; WA 44, 518, 12—519, 2; *Additio in locum Hoseae cap. 13* (printed edition), 1545, WA 40 III, 765, 14—16.

⁴⁶ "In oculis tuis est mortuus . . . sed coram deo est somnus." *Predigt*, 1523, WA 11, 206, 27—28. "Darumb heist der tod für unserm Herrn Gott nicht tod, Für uns heist er und ist ein tod, wenn wir sterben. Aber für Gott ists so ein leiser schlaff, das er nit köndt leiser sein." *Predigt* (Dietrich's 1544 *Hauspostille*), WA 52, 480, 8—10. See also *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1532, WA 36, 347, 11 ff.; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 22:11, 1539/40?, WA 43, 221, 25—27, 30—34/AE 4, 119—20; *Die Vorrede zu der Sammlung der Begräbnislieder*, 1542, WA 35, 478, 12—18/AE 53, 326.

⁴⁷ "Credentibus enim mors non est mors, sed somnus quidam. Nam cum terror, stimulus et vis illa mortis abest, non potest dici mors. Quanto igitur maior fides est, tanto mors est imbecillior; Quanto autem fides minor est, tanto mors est acerbior." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 5:21-24, 1536, WA 42, 256, 27—30/AE 1, 349. See also *Predigt* (1534 printed edition), 1532, WA 36, 548, 3—6; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1533, WA 37, 200, 4—6 (see

Dietrich's *Hauspostille*, 1544 WA 52, 542, 3 ff.); *Bibel- und Bucheinverzeichnungen*, 1541 to 42?, WA 48, No. 205, 158, 2—6. See also WA 35, 478, 12—18.

⁴⁸ "Ein schlafender Mensch ist einem Todten sehr ähnlich, darum hat man fein erdacht, der Schlaf sei ein Bruder des Todes, und selbst in Tag und Nacht ist das Bild des Lebens und des Todes abgemalt." *Tischrede* (Cordatus), date uncertain, W² 22, Cap. 48, No. 15, 1308. See also *Predigt* (*Fastenpostille*), 1525, WA 17 II, 235, 17 ff.; Letter to Luther's father, 1530, WA BR 5, No. 1529, 241, 82—87/LCC 18, 32; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift* and printed editions), 1531, WA 34 II, 277, 5—7, 13—17, 23—26; *Predigt* (Cruciger's edition of 1534), 1532, WA 36, 544, 32—36 (this writer did not find a corresponding statement in Rörer's *Nachschrift* printed on the same page); *Tischrede*, Bindseil and Khumer, 1538, WA TR 4, No. 4203, 200, 9—201, 1; *Bibel- und Bucheinverzeichnungen*, on John 8:51, 1541, WA 48, No. 205, 157, 3—7; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Hauspostille*), date uncertain, W² 13B, 1740—41; *Predigt* (Rörer's 1559 edition), W¹ 13, 2263.

⁴⁹ "Heisset [Paulus in I Thessalonicher 4:13-14] unsern tod nicht ein tod, sondern ein schlaff, und Christus tod heisset er ein rechten tod, Da mit gibt er dem tod Christi solche treffliche macht, das wir da gegen unsern tod sollen für einen schlaff achten." *Predigt* (printed edition), 1532, WA 36, 240, 32—35 (see 24—25)/AE 51, 233—34. See also in the work just cited, WA 36, 252, 30—32/AE 51, 242; *Predigt* (printed edition of 1534), 1532, WA 36, 547, 34—39, 548, 13—25 (this writer did not find a similar phrase in Rörer's *Nachschrift*, WA 36, 547—48); *Die Vorrede zu der Sammlung der Begräbnislieder*, 1542, WA 35, 478, 12—18/AE 53, 326; *Predigt* (*Nachtrag* to Cruciger's *Sommerpostille*), 1545, WA 22, 440, 9—13. (This writer did not find a similar statement in Rörer's or Stolz's *Nachschriften*, WA 49, 694—701.)

⁵⁰ "Morte, quae tamen ipsi [Deo] non mors est, sed somnus, qui est quasi frater et consanguineus mortis. Quando enim homo sepeli-

In a sermon preached in 1532 Luther said that in death it is only the five senses which die.⁵¹ He affirmed that "God talks with the dead";⁵² that the dead "hear," "think," and "see";⁵³ that they "experience visions and the discourses of the angels and of God";⁵⁴ that God opens the eyes of the dead,⁵⁵ and they "see with spiritual eyes after death."⁵⁶

tur, Deo non est mortuus, sed dormit." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 22:11, 1539/40? WA 43, 221, 25—27/AE 4, 119 (and note 28 on AE 4, 119). See also *Predigt* (Nuremberg Codex only), 1531, WA 34 II, 277, 13—17 (this writer did not find this phrase in Rörer's *Nachschrift*, WA 34 II, 277, 5—7, nor in the printed edition of 1593, WA 34 II, 277, 23—26); *Tischrede*, date uncertain, W² 22, Cap. 48, No. 15, 1308 (note 48 above).

⁵¹ "Iam non aliter morietur quam in 5 sensi [bus]." *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1532, WA 36, 248, 9. (See 30—31 of the printed edition.)

⁵² ". . . loquitur Deus cum mortuis non aliter." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 26:24-25, after 1540, WA 43, 481, 24—25. See also note 38 above.

⁵³ "Est ist war: Animae audiunt, sentiunt, vident post mortem, aber wie es zugehet, vortzen wir nicht." *Tischrede* (Heidenreich), 1542/43, WA TR 5, No. 5534, 219, 3—8. And see *Tessaradecus consolatoria pro laborantibus et oneratis*, 1520, WA 6, 122, 38—123, 1; *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 192, 28—29/Lenker 13, 27; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Handschrift*), 1523, WA 11, 127, 13—19 (see the printed edition, WA 12, 596, 12—17); *Annotationes in aliquot capita Matthaei*, 1538, WA 38, 653, 34—654, 3; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 4:10, 1536, WA 42, 212, 19—25/AE 1, 287. (In regard to the passages on Lazarus and the rich man, see the qualification added to note 42 above.)

⁵⁴ "Anima . . . patitur visiones, loquelas Angelorum et Dei." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, after 1540, WA 43, 360, 27—28/AE 4, 313.

⁵⁵ Quando aliquis Sanctus mor[itur], deus aperit amb[os] oculos." *Predigt* (Rörer's notes), WA 36, 260, 8 (see the printed edition, WA 36, 260, 30)/AE 51, 247.

⁵⁶ "Disce igitur et crede esse alios oculos spirituales, quibus credentes in Christum videant,

Luther felt compelled by God's reference to the deceased Abraham as "My servant" (Gen. 26:24) to affirm that Abraham "lives, serves, and reigns with God" (see note 45 above). Several times Luther asserted on the basis of the First Epistle of Peter that Christ preached to the dead.⁵⁷ The great Reformer also taught that on the Last Day believers who had died would hear the voice of the archangel and of Christ.⁵⁸

Luther also spoke of the joy and peace experienced by departed believers. According to him they "enjoy everlasting peace and safety,"⁵⁹ embrace death as "the most joyous peace,"⁶⁰ and "take delight in Christ's embrace."⁶¹

cum per mortem isti corporis oculi clausi, vel potius prorsus extincti sunt." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 15:1, 1537/38? WA 42, 556, 8—10/AE 3, 11. Cf. *Predigt* (printed in 1527), 1523/24, WA 24, 705, 21—28; *Predigt* (*Fastenpostille*), 1525, WA 17 II, 236, 1—6.

⁵⁷ Letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, 1522, note 36 above; *Auslegung des Hosea* (Dietrich's edition of 1545), 1524, W² 6, 1124; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 7:1, 1536, WA 42, 322, 27—29/AE 2, 85—86; *Tischrede* (recorder not known), 1540, WA TR 5, No. 5356a, 84, 4—8, 20 (cf. No. 5356b, 86, 4—5, 14—17). But for a different interpretation see *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523, WA 12, 367—69.

⁵⁸ "Das heisset er [Paulus, in I Thessalonicher 4:16-18] hie ein feld geschrei odder stimme des Ertzengels, das ist: die der Ertzengel wird schreien, das mans mit ohren hören wird." *Predigt* (printed edition), 1532, WA 36, 268, 31—33/AE 51, 254. And see *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1533, WA 37, 149, 22—26; and note 9 above.

⁵⁹ "Frui perpetua, pace et securitate." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 25:7-10, after 1540, WA 43, 361, 20/AE 4, 314.

⁶⁰ Paul "illam [mors praematura] amplecteretur ut laetissimam pacem . . ." [Luther is referring to Phil. 1:23] *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius*, 1535, WA 40 I, 598, 21/AE 26, 393.

⁶¹ "Is [Christus] noster Abraham est, cuius complexu fruimur." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on

In 1544 George Hoessel's son died. Luther consoled the bereaved father with these words:

Inasmuch as Christ . . . indicates that "in heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven" [Matt. 18:10], you must have no doubt that your son is rejoicing with our Savior, Christ, and with all the saints.⁶²

In 1542 Luther wrote to Justus Jonas:

After mourning for a season, we shall enter into joy unspeakable, where your Cathy and my Magdalene, together with many others, have preceded us and daily call, admonish, and beckon us to follow.⁶³

In the same year Luther wrote about the deceased Urbanus Rhegius:

We know that he is blessed and has life and eternal joy in fellowship with Christ and the heavenly church, in which he now personally learns, sees, and hears of those things which he proclaimed here in the church in accordance with the Word of God.⁶⁴

25:7-10, after 1540, WA 43, 358, 13—14/AE 4, 310.

⁶² "Dieweil dann Christus . . . sagt dabei ein Zeichen, dass ihre Engel allezeit Gottes Angesicht sehen, sollet ihr nicht zweifeln, er sei bei unserm Heiland Christo und bei allen Seligen in Freuden." Letter to George Hösel, 1544, WA BR 10, 699, 9—13/LCC 18, 79.

⁶³ "Nos modicum contristatos excipiet inenarrabili laetitia, ad quam tua Ketha et mea Magdalena cum multis aliis nos praecesserunt, et quotidie nos, ut sequamur, vocant, hortantur, alliciunt." Letter to Justus Jonas, 1542, WA BR 10, No. 3829, 227, 27—30/Translation from LCC 18, 76.

⁶⁴ "Sciamus beatum esse et habere vitam et laeticiam aeternam in societate Christi et Ecclesiae coelestis, in qua nunc ea coram discit, cernit et audit, de quibus hic in Ecclesia iuxta verbum Dei disseruit." Preface to *Urbanus Rhegius, Prophetiae veteris testamenti de Christo*, 1542, WA 53, 400, 17—19. Paul Althaus asserts that Luther "clearly knows of a blessed-

Luther also spoke of God's care and preservation of the dead. In the Genesis lectures he concluded from Matt. 22:32⁶⁵ that "the dead, too, live and have a God who cares for them and preserves them in a life that is different from this physical one in which the saints are afflicted."⁶⁶ In 1532 he asserted that angels wait on a Christian after he has died.⁶⁷

Luther also taught that it is permissible to pray for the dead.⁶⁸ He was willing to

ness with Christ in heaven which is the possession of one who dies in the faith before the Last Day," and cites the above quotation as evidence. But then he adds: "Or was Luther, in keeping with his understanding of everlasting life, here thinking of the Last Day as already present?" Paul Althaus, *Die Letzten Dinge; Lehrbuch der Eschatologie*, 5th edition (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), p. 148, note 2.

⁶⁵ "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

⁶⁶ "Ergo Deus est mortuorum Deus, hoc est, Ergo etiam mortui vivunt et habent Deum curantem et salvantem eos in alia vita, quam haec corporalis est, in qua Sancti affliguntur." *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 4:9, 1536, WA 42, 210, 27—29/Translation from AE 1, 285.

⁶⁷ "Mussen alle Engel da sein und auff in warten, unten, oben und rings umb in her." *Predigt* (printed edition), 1532, WA 36, 260, 31—32/AE 51, 247. Rörer's notes (WA 36, 260, 9) contain only this phrase: "Ibi omnes ang[eli]." Cf. *Predigt* (printed edition), 1529, WA 29, 395, 27—28; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Handschrift*), 1531, WA 34 I, 530, 15—19 (see also the Nuremberg Codex, 530, 28—31 and 531, 19—23).

⁶⁸ *Ein Sermon von dem neuen Testament, das ist von der heiligen Messe* (first printed edition), 1520, WA 6, 372, 4—10; *Predigt* (Luther's edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 194, 25—195, 14, 21—24/Lenker 13, 29—30; *Predigt* (Rörer's *Nachschrift*), 1522, WA 10 III, 409, 5—410, 9; *Predigt* (printed edition), 1523, WA 11, 130, 30; Letter to Bartholomew von Staremberg, 1524, WA 18, 6, 22—23/LCC 18, 54; *Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis* (first printed edition), 1528, WA 26, 508, 1—4; Smalcald Articles Part II, II, 14, as printed in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutheri-*

grant that the saints in light pray for us.⁶⁹ Although he rejected the ritual invocation of the saints as practiced by the medieval church (see note 69 above), he did not reject an evangelical invocation of the saints but as late as 1521 practiced such an invocation himself.⁷⁰

schen Kirche, 4th edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959), p. 421, lines 14—18. For qualifications, see *Vom Gneuel der Stillmesse* (printed edition), 1525, WA 18, 31, 10—15/AE 36, 322; *Genesis Vorlesung*, on 35:20, after 1540, WA 44, 203, 19—20.

⁶⁹ Smalcald Articles Part II, II, 26, *op. cit.*, p. 425, lines 1—3; *Tischrede* (Anton Lauterbach's *Tagebuch aufs Jahre 1538*), WA TR 3, No. 3695, 540, 2—4.

⁷⁰ *Das Magnificat Vortentschet und ausgelegt* (printed edition), 1521, WA 7, 545, 27—29/AE 21, 298; 574, 32—575, 3/AE 21, 329; 601, 10—11/AE 21, 355. See also *Predigt* (printed edition), 1519, WA 2, 696, 21—27; *Letter to Johann Lang*, 1522, WA BR 2, No. 501, 547—48; *Predigt* (printed edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 322, 6—10; 325, 13—326, 17;

The conclusion of this study is that Blessed Luther was less than wholly consistent in his teaching about the state of the dead between death and the Day of Resurrection.⁷¹ This inconsistency can be documented from the early years of his life as a Reformer until the closing years of his life.⁷²

Grover, Mo.

Predigt (printed edition), 1522, WA 10 III, 391, 36—392, 2.

⁷¹ See also Quistorp: "Luther's teaching about the sleep of death and the state of the departed is by no means consistent. How sleep is to be conceived, whether unconscious or in some way consciously expectant, remains vague in his writings; likewise it is not clear whether the souls of the pious sleep in the grave with the body or whether carried aloft by angels they already rest in the bosom of God in heaven." (P. 100)

⁷² I am deeply indebted to Dr. Arthur Carl Piepkorn who provided me with invaluable guidance in the preparation of this paper.

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