

Concordia Theological Monthly



M A R C H

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Walter Arthur Maier, 1893—1950

ON January 11, 1950, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, like all other sections of our Church, was thrown into a state of deepest mourning by the news that one of its professors, Dr. Walter A. Maier, shortly after midnight had departed this life. While since 1944 he had been on leave of absence, devoting his energies almost exclusively to the work of the Lutheran Hour, he was living on the campus, had contact with other professors and with students, and sent out his Sunday broadcasts from Station KFUE, located on the campus of Concordia Seminary. It was known that on December 29 he had been stricken with a serious heart ailment, but quite generally the hope was entertained that owing to his apparently inexhaustible resources of physical strength and endurance he would soon recover; but the Lord willed otherwise.

It cannot be the purpose of these brief observations to describe in detail Dr. Maier's activities. A few general remarks will have to suffice. The departed colleague was an extremely versatile man. He was widely read, possessed a retentive memory, and could use his gifts and learning with equal facility inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps he will be chiefly remembered for his ability as a public speaker. It may be difficult to define eloquence, but he certainly possessed it. Enormous audiences hung spellbound on his lips. He had a rich, varied vocabulary at his disposal, and the matchless felicity of expression which graced his utterances was the delight of learned and unlearned hearers alike. This endowment, connected with the gift of forceful, dramatic presentation, made him one of the foremost orators of our day.

In this note we wish to speak especially of his theology. Whoever heard him, soon noticed that Dr. Maier was a Biblical theologian. It was his constant aim to preach the great truths of the Scriptures, Law and Gospel, sin and grace, Christ and His redemption. The modern speculations in the field of doctrine had little interest for him. There was no attempt made by him to gain a hearing by advocating doctrinal compromises. With absolute fearlessness and definite clarity he uttered his convictions. Throughout the English-speaking world he was considered one of the chief

spokesmen of conservative Christianity. It was self-evident to him that he should strive to adhere to the Lutheran Confessions, to which he had pledged loyalty when he accepted the call to the professorship. In his view these Confessions correctly set forth Scripture teaching. The Bible was to him the inerrant Word of God. The many attacks of critics on the authority and reliability of the Old Testament, while he took cognizance of them, did not shake his faith in the least. As an exegete he ranked high. His conference papers, for instance, on Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and the Prophet Amos, showed that he knew how to bring to the surface the pure gold of divine truth contained in the passages of Holy Scripture. In his classroom work as teacher of the Old Testament he took pains to do justice to the philological questions involved when he interpreted a text. His notes on Genesis, the Psalms, and Isaiah, the books on which he chiefly lectured, are extensive and thorough. It is hoped that his commentary on the Prophet Nahum, which was almost ready for print, can be issued before long.

In Dr. Maier one saw exemplified in a remarkable degree conformity to the old Lutheran principle that theology should be a *habitus practicus theosdotos*. Theology was to him not simply a science among sciences, a subject for investigation to bring to light interesting and probably useful facts, but it was to him an intensely practical and indispensable activity to acquaint men with the way of salvation, which is through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. In keeping with this attitude, he led a life of humble prayer, and to be present at his family devotions was a true benediction.

In addition to other relatives, his death is mourned by his widow, the former Miss Hulda Eickhoff, and his two sons, Walter, Jr., pastor in Elma, N. Y., and Paul, a student at Harvard. His memory will be cherished by millions of people all over the world.

Requiescat in pace, et lux aeterna luceat ei!

WM. ARNDT