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Each of the six articles on individuals in this issue features a photograph of the person who is the subject of the article. Photographs on pages 4 and 38 are from originals in the collections of the Concordia Historical Institute, Department of Archives and History of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 804 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105, and are used with their permission. Further reproduction is not permitted.

Due to the delay in printing and mailing this combined January/April 2010 issue, the July 2010 and October 2010 issues will probably also be combined and mailed later this year.

The Editors

A Look into Our Own Past

Most of the articles in this issue were originally papers delivered at this seminary's January 2009 symposia. They examine individuals who influenced in some manner the not-so-distant past of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The authors have done extensive research on their subjects. Some also actually knew the individuals of whom they wrote. They are sympathetic to what these individuals accomplished, but not without being critical. These are not biographical tributes, the kind often found in church ordination and funeral bulletins. Using the encomium approach, developed in the classical Greco-Roman world, would mean failure to come to terms with the theological clockwork that made these men tick. These articles, instead, are analytical, and so each pursues its task in its own way. Each tackles a complex person living in a different context. Hour-long lectures cannot offer an exhaustive treatment of an individual, but one does not have to drink the whole bottle to taste the wine. Since the personal history of several of the writers overlaps with that of their individual subjects, what they wrote also may tell us something about themselves. These essays will elicit either pleasant nostalgia or serious annoyance—reader response at its level best. The younger generation may have read something written by the individual subjects of these articles, or may at least be familiar with their names. Some of these individuals helped shape the recent past of our synod, so these articles can help us understand what we are today, and even provide perspective for our future. The last two articles fast-forward us to contemporary church history. Both are essays from the 2010 symposium, one on the future of the ELCA as a confessional church and the other on feminized God-talk. The seminary's annual biblical and confessional symposia reflect the institution's purpose in constantly engaging theology. This challenge will emerge again in the January 2011 confessional symposium dedicated to the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of C.F.W. Walther. As with all the annual symposia, unexpected outcomes can be expected.

The Editors

Walter A. Maier as Evangelical Preacher¹

Richard J. Shuta

Before the Church Growth Movement and non-denominational megachurches, before the commercial internet, high-definition television, and the iPad, before there were prosperous religious book writers and televangelists, such as Pat Robertson, Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, and Joyce Meyer, a successful media entrepreneur appeared on the American scene. The surprise to many historians of American church history is that the man came from what many considered an isolated midwestern Lutheran denomination. His name was Walter Arthur Maier (1893–1950), or “WAM” as his friends called him. Historian Robert T. Handy once said that Maier is the “missing link” in twentieth-century church history between the famous evangelists Billy Sunday and William (“Billy”) Graham.²

I. American Evangelicalism

Walter A. Maier’s radio ministry began at a crucial time in both the political and religious arenas. Maier initiated an evangelism approach using the new medium of radio that gained ascendancy between the time of the Fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century and the new movement that eventually became known as Evangelicalism.³

Many young fundamentalists felt that the Fundamentalist movement was guilty of denominational separatism and an unhealthy anti-

¹ This article draws on research that I did for my doctoral thesis at Drew University entitled “The Militant Evangelicalist of the Missouri Synod: Walter Arthur Maier and His Theological Orientation.” This thesis is under “restricted status” and can only be released by its author. After Maier’s death, his library and all his personal correspondence were sent to the Concordia Historical Institute where they remained undisturbed and not catalogued until my work. Since the writing of the thesis, Concordia Historical Institute has produced “A Guide and Inventory of the Papers of Walter A. Maier,” prepared by Jamie Lambing, CHI, 1993.

² This was related in a personal conversation the author had with Handy.

³ Evangelicalism should not be confused with Fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was a militant attack on a theological liberalism—often called Modernism—that denied the inerrancy of Scripture and key doctrines of creedal Christianity, especially those connected to Jesus’ unique nature and ministry. Modernism’s public radio face was Harry Emerson Fosdick, a New York City preacher. Maier often alluded to Fosdick in his radio sermons.

intellectualism. American Evangelicalism grew out of this concern. Historians of American Evangelicalism point out that it is a three-pronged movement: first, a set of theological convictions (such as the inerrancy of Scripture and the divinity of Christ), passionately held and militantly defended; second, an ethos that stresses a spiritually transformed life committed to social outreach; and third, media evangelism. David Dockery summarized Evangelicals as "those who believe the gospel is to be experienced personally, defined biblically, and communicated passionately."⁴

Twentieth-century Evangelicalism counts among its forerunners such optimistic, charismatic personalities as Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875), Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899), and Billy (William Ashley) Sunday (1863–1935).⁵ These evangelists saw that mass-production techniques succeeded in business and that the same techniques could be used in evangelism.

American Evangelicals began using radio as an effective instrument for mass evangelism. By the early 1940s, Charles E. Fuller's "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour" had gained one of the largest radio audiences in the country. In 1943, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded as a loose affiliation of diverse evangelical denominations and individuals to promote evangelism. Then, in 1956, the magazine *Christianity Today* came into existence as the literary voice of American Evangelicalism. Though many books have been written on American Evangelicalism, most of them have not acknowledged the significant role that Walter A. Maier played in its development.

II. Historical Background on Walter A. Maier

Walter A. Maier was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 4, 1893. Maier attended Cotton Mather Public School in the Dorchester section of Boston. From age 13 to 19, he attended Concordia Collegiate Institute, Bronxville, New York, which at the time was a Lutheran high school and junior college. Unlike most of his classmates, Maier did not enter a seminary immediately upon graduation. He decided instead to pursue the A.B. degree from Boston University.

⁴ David D. Dockery, *Southern Baptists & American Evangelicals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 48.

⁵ Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "Charles Finney on Theology and Worship," *CTQ* 62 (1998): 63–67; Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "Faith in Contemporary Evangelicalism," *CTQ* 70 (2006): 323–340; Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "American Christianity and Its Jesuses," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 175–194.

In 1913 he entered Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In addition to being an excellent student, Maier also exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit. He sold typewriters, books, and market produce. He also mimeographed and sold copies of the lectures of Professors Pieper and Dau. The St. Louis seminary professors delivered lectures in German, heavily sprinkled with Latin quotations. The students were expected to take down dutifully lectures as delivered.

From 1916 to 1920, and intermittently during the 1920s, Maier attended Harvard University, where he earned his doctorate. He honed his debating and communication skills while at Harvard and was awarded first prize in the "Billings Prize Contest" in oratory.

III. Maier as *The Walther League Messenger* Editor

Maier began his first position as a pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) on October 2, 1920, when he became the executive secretary of the Walther League, the official youth organization of the LCMS.⁶ The League's rallies and camps created a cohesive and loyal group of young men and women with a new vision for the LCMS.

The Walther League Messenger, the League's magazine, was widely read, and its pages covered a variety of practical issues. Under Maier's editorship (1920–1945), the magazine reached a circulation of 75,000. In 1921, *The Walther League Messenger* listed seven purposes for the Walther League. One of them was "to make intelligent and energetic church workers." Another purpose was "to increase the love for our foreign mission work through the support of missionaries and native workers."⁷

During the 1920s, the masthead above the lead editorial in *The Walther League Messenger* included the phrase "For Church and Home." But in 1930 a new phrase appeared over the opening editorial: "Dedicated to the Defense of the Truth, the Propagation of the Faith and a Practical Interpretation of the Christian Religion."⁸ These three foci reflected Maier's lifelong theological orientation, which emphasized militancy on behalf of world evangelization that was intended to produce concrete ethical and social results.

Early in this twenty-five year editorship of the *Messenger*, Maier both refuted and attacked an article in a newspaper that, among other things,

⁶ Jon Pahl, *Hopes and Dreams of All: The International Walther League and Lutheran Youth in American Culture, 1893–1993* (Chicago: Wheat Ridge Ministries, 1993).

⁷ *The Walther League Messenger* 30 (1921): 102.

⁸ *The Walther League Messenger* 38 (1930): 263.

thought "the Church of Christ is immoral because it is militant, that is, because it is a battling and struggling church." Maier contended that the church on this earth "will always be a fighting, a militant church."⁹

During the economic depression of the 1930s, Maier wrote several *Messenger* articles that gave readers not only good, concrete principles of management and rules for success, but also words of encouragement. He praised those leaders in business, medicine, and politics that used success for the cause of Christianity.¹⁰ He was also critical of "the picture of Christianity as an agency that frowns upon any preeminence which its followers may receive."¹¹ Maier was acquainted with the Dale Carnegie seminars and the Carnegie book on how to influence people. But Maier warned against some of its principles that seemed to suggest "that the purpose of making friends is to get something out of them and to profit personally through friendship."¹²

Maier had a justly deserved reputation of being a highly ethical person. He himself once wrote that "success cannot be purchased at the price of dishonesty, either in spirit or in act, but that 100 percent plus application to the requirements of our present work in time, energy and devotion alone can produce that faithfulness which has the promise of reward."¹³

IV. Maier as Educator

In 1922, at the age of 29, Maier was called to teach Hebrew grammar and Old Testament exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He thereby became one of twelve professors for a student body of 366. Maier continued as professor there until 1944, when a synodical convention granted him a leave of absence. Maier had close colleagues among the seminary's younger faculty, such as John H.C. Fritz, a professor of practical theology, and William Arndt, a New Testament exegete. Maier's passion for evangelism and world missions led him to organize the Student's Missionary Society and serve as its faculty advisor.

⁹ Walter A. Maier, "The Four Follies of Dr. Frank Crane," *Walther League Messenger* 30 (1921): 10-11; 34.

¹⁰ Walter A. Maier, "Professional Men Testify to Christ," *Walther League Messenger* 49 (1940): 10-11.

¹¹ Walter A. Maier, "Substitution for Sisyphus," *Walther League Messenger* 38 (1930): 193.

¹² Walter A. Maier, "How to Win Real Friends," *Walther League Messenger* 45 (1937): 342-343; 396.

¹³ Maier, "Substitution for Sisyphus," 193.

V. The "Americanization" of the Missouri Synod

On the political and social scene, the United States was changing fast, and so was the synod that Maier publicly represented. From the end of the American Civil War to the end of World War I, the LCMS was noted for two things. The first was a theological conservatism that held its pastors to an unconditional subscription to all the confessional writings of the 1580 *Book of Concord*. The second characteristic, one that it held in common with other ethnic groups, was its isolation from American linguistic and social patterns.¹⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the LCMS was still largely theologically and culturally the synod of the previous century: strongly German, midwestern, and rural. However, the impact of World War I, centered in the heart of Lutheranism, along with decreased German immigration to the United States after the war, forced the LCMS into a greater use of the English language. Some LCMS officials debated whether the English language could be widely used by the synod without a corresponding dilution of its confessional Lutheranism.

The cultural-linguistic isolation of the LCMS began to change rapidly with a new group of young pastors, often connected with the Walther League, who were skilled in the use of the English language. Among this group was Walter A. Maier. Moreover, young friends of Maier also became leaders who creatively and vigorously supported the process.¹⁵

Another important agency for change in the LCMS was the Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL), organized in 1917.¹⁶ It established the radio station KFUD, which began broadcasting on October 26, 1924. From its center on the campus of Concordia Seminary, it began broadcasting The Lutheran Hour radio program in 1930. This radio program contributed immensely to Maier's influence. But the LCMS did not seem to be growing in America like it should be.

VI. Slow Synodical Growth Calls for New Forms of Outreach

In the 1920s, the rate of growth in the LCMS slowed to fifteen percent. Although a public representative of the LCMS, Maier challenged it in a

¹⁴ Carl S. Meyer, editor, *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 344.

¹⁵ Alan N. Graebner, "The Acculturation of an Immigrant Lutheran Church: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1917–1929," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1965.

¹⁶ Fred and Edith Pankow, *75 years of Blessings and the Best is Yet to Come! A History of the International Lutheran Laymen's League*, ed. Gerald Perschbacher (St. Louis: International LLL, 1992).

Walther League Messenger article that asked, "Is there a 'Nod' in Synod?" He acknowledged that the Missouri Synod represented a "pure Lutheranism," but it needed more practical applications of its doctrine in such areas as church contributions. He wrote that the synod needed greater inspiration and information on practical Christian living. The synod's youth especially needed the biblical word taught to them in such a way "that is directly adapted to their needs."¹⁷ Additionally, as the decade of the "Roaring Twenties" drew to a close, more and more pastors within the LCMS sought wider contact with the unchurched, English-speaking, urban populace, who needed to be reached with the pure gospel.

In the early 1930s, the LCMS began its first program of what we today would term "evangelism," even though this term was not yet used. It was obvious that evangelism was needed but "when the word evangelist was used in synodical publications it was always in the negative sense—to warn members about the dangers of the emotional approach of evangelists. All evangelism was seen as part of the sawdust trail of revivalism."¹⁸ The synod-wide evangelism program was known as the "Call of the Hour." Materials for this campaign were printed in both German and English. Concordia Publishing House also began publishing the *Men and Missions* series at this time.

VII. The Tension between Content and Communication

By the 1940s, the LCMS recognized that its two strands of theological tradition, concern for correctness of belief and gospel outreach, seemed to be in conflict. Maier also faced the challenge of maintaining the Lutheran Hour message as truly Lutheran ("keeping it straight"), and integrating new communication methods, some of which had successfully been used by the entrepreneurial revivalist-evangelists Finney and Moody.

Other Lutherans had already seen the need. The New York-based American Lutheran Publicity Bureau began in 1913 and was well established to bring Old Lutheranism before the American public. It was not until 1948, however, that the LCMS established a department of public relations. Oswald C.J. Hoffman was its first director.

The concern for both purity of doctrine and the spreading the gospel constantly tugged within Maier as it did in the church body to which he belonged. "Old Lutherans" in the LCMS stressed the purity and fullness of

¹⁷ Walther League Messenger 31 (1923): 360–361.

¹⁸ Eldon Weisheit, *The Zeal of His House: Five Generations of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod History, 1847–1972* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 96.

right doctrine and the need to avoid open, visible church fellowship with other religious groups unless strict theological criteria were met. Moreover, LCMS theologians condemned the "New Measures" style of preaching and evangelism introduced in the 1800s by revivalists such as Charles Finney.

[Finney] believed so strongly in human free will, he believed the evangelist, if he followed the proper methods, could reap a harvest of converts. Therefore, he utilized the protracted meeting; the anxious bench for repentant sinners; the use of long, emotional prayers; and the use of organized choirs; all designed to break the stubborn will of the prospective convert. . . . He truly believed Christians who were entirely sanctified could bring about a thorough reform of American civilization so that the kingdom of God would come to America. Such optimism dovetailed perfectly with the individualism and self-sufficiency of the new nation.¹⁹

Additionally, some of his converts led key reform movements, especially those dedicated to the abolition of slavery. These revivalist preachers were making a large impact on unchurched Americans, and altered the direction of American Christianity as well.

VIII. Lutheran Hour Rallies

Like previous pioneers in mass evangelism such as Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday, Maier showed his organizational genius and advertising skills in carefully produced Lutheran Hour rallies, which accustomed Missouri Synod Lutherans to a worship style more characteristic of the new Evangelicalism. On September 27, 1936, a Lutheran Hour rally was held in Cleveland, Ohio, and three thousand friends of the Lutheran Hour were in attendance.

To aid in the success of such rallies, Maier produced the 41-page "Lutheran Hour Rallies Manual."²⁰ Like Finney, Maier recognized the importance of using mass children and adult choirs, as well as bands and orchestras. Maier noted that these ensembles were "in themselves very fine attractions and excite wide interest. Furthermore, they guaranteed a substantial body of attendance on the part of the participants, relatives and friends."²¹ Maier wrote that the cooperation of local pastors was also

¹⁹ James P. Eckman, *Perspectives From Church History* (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 1996), 81.

²⁰ Walter A. Maier, *Lutheran Hour Rallies: A Manual*. This manual does not have a date of publication or page numbers. Page numbers referenced below have been assigned by the author. This manual is in the author's private collection.

²¹ Maier, *A Manual*, 23.

needed since their assistance could "do much to increase the size of the listening audience."²² Despite the fear within the LCMS of any type of religious unionism, Maier recommended the following: "Under given circumstances, consideration may be given to the possibility of having men of other Lutheran Synods, or other organizations, enjoy representation on the committee."²³

In the *Walther League Messenger* article entitled "It Pays to Advertise—If," Maier acknowledged the value of advertising for evangelism.²⁴ His enthusiastic supporters saw to it that publicity for Lutheran Hour Rallies featured Maier prominently. Often official souvenir programs were prepared for rallies, such as that in Chicago on October 3, 1943, in which 25,000 people were in attendance. The 36-page "Official Souvenir Program" booklet featured a page of pictures of the Maier family. It was a reflection of the celebrity status Maier had achieved among the Lutheran Hour listeners.

IX. Maier's Contacts with Influential Non-Lutheran Leaders

Maier's correspondence in the 1930s and 1940s reveals that he held a wide variety of contacts with conservative Christians in other denominations. William B. Eerdmans sought Maier's aid, articles, and cooperation for the publication of a new magazine that Eerdmans desired to establish, as he said, "for the purpose of spreading the great truths of historical Christianity in practically every phase of life and thought."²⁵ Maier wrote back, "I shall, of course, be ready to cooperate in the publication of the new magazine provided that none of the principles of biblical Christianity be set aside. Under your auspices and sponsorship, I feel that there is no danger of the slightest disparagement of revealed truth."²⁶

At the same time that Maier established personal rapport with conservative reformed leaders, he maintained the friendship of the young LCMS liturgical scholar, Arthur Carl Piepkorn. In a series of letters to Piepkorn, Maier revealed his sensitivity and flexibility in the area of church ceremonies. He advised his former student to go a little slower in introducing new liturgical practices among his people. Maier wrote,

²² Maier, *A Manual*, 24.

²³ Maier, *A Manual*, 6.

²⁴ *Walther League Messenger* 37 (1929): 558.

²⁵ Letter, July 31, 1933, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

²⁶ Letter, August 5, 1933, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

I simply want to counsel you against any inordinate haste, because I know that the hammers of cavil will swing long and loud particularly against the career and work of any active Christian pastor who is engaged in unusual missionary opportunities and who refuses to adhere to the line of tradition for that line is the line of least resistance.²⁷

X. The 1940s and Dissensions on Fellowship in the LCMS

Continuing its traditional stance toward fellowship with other Christians, *A Brief Statement* was adopted by the LCMS in 1932. It became a key document with which any church body desiring fellowship with the LCMS must be in complete agreement.

In 1943, however, the book *Toward Lutheran Union* appeared.²⁸ Lutheran chaplains serving the Armed Forces received it as a complimentary copy. The book was suspected by some of promoting a non-confessional unionism. The 1944 LCMS convention, held in Saginaw, Michigan, brought the controversy into the open. The tone and outcome of this convention disheartened some within the LCMS.

Following the convention, this "Eastern element," linked not by geography but by its outlook on fellowship, concluded that legalism was rampant within the LCMS and needed to be corrected. Finding its strongest leaders among those associated with *The American Lutheran*, this group sought the aid of the magazine's editorial board. William Arndt and W.G. Polack, both colleagues of Maier at Concordia Seminary, also joined the group who were opposed to what they considered to be Missouri's legalistic spirit.

A meeting was held in Chicago on September 6 and 7, 1945. This meeting drew forty-two clergymen and one layman. Among the pastors in attendance was the future Lutheran Hour speaker Oswald Hoffman. Walter A. Maier was not there. The conferees at Chicago then prepared a position paper that was mailed to all the LCMS clergymen. This document was entitled "A Statement," but became known as "The Statement of the Forty-Four" due to its forty-four signatories. Consisting of twelve positive theses, "A Statement" begins with nine theses that are accompanied by a negative statement starting with the words, "We, therefore, deplore."

The response to "A Statement" varied throughout the LCMS, but a vocal opposition to it centered in the Indiana, Central Illinois, and

²⁷ Letter, October 30, 1933, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

²⁸ Theodore Graebner and Paul E. Kretzmann, *Toward Lutheran Union: A Scriptural and Historical Approach* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943).

Northern Illinois districts of the Missouri Synod. The LCMS administration, headed by John W. Behnken, its first American-born president, from 1935-1962, was largely hostile to it. The public outcome of the various meetings between representatives of the LCMS *Praesidium* and the initial signers of "A Statement" was that it was withdrawn "as a basis for discussion." The signers, however, never retracted its contents.

Despite the growing tension within the LCMS between those who wanted a greater contact with non-Missouri Synod Christians and those who did not, Maier remained popular with the hearers of his radio broadcasts. During Maier's sixteen and a half years as the Lutheran Hour speaker, he preached 509 sermons, many of which were reproduced in twenty sermon books from Concordia Publishing House. He also authored *For Better Not For Worse*, a popular book on marriage and the Christian home. *Time* called Maier the "Chrysostom of American Lutheranism."²⁹ He became the first Lutheran preacher in history to be heard around the world on a regular basis.³⁰ Part of this popularity was because Maier's sermons and *Messenger* articles exhibited a practical social consciousness that addressed the concerns of middle-class American families, a characteristic also of Evangelicalism.

XI. Maier's Ethical and Social Consciousness

Since the largest part of Maier's public career was in the America of the 1930s and 1940s, his writings and radio messages addressed such problems as civil unrest caused by social and economic ills. He confronted the problem of "Militarism" and its vengeful spirit arising out of the conflict of World War II. Additionally, Maier constantly spoke out against atheistic communism, so much so that eventually the editorial board of the *Walther League Messenger* sought his resignation, which he tendered, as he said in a letter to the board, because the publication no longer held to his emphases.³¹

Racism

Born and raised in cosmopolitan Boston, Maier learned to be sensitive to the ethnic variety within America. But his concern for a multi-racial America was based on his theological understanding of Jesus' ministry. He

²⁹ "Religion: Lutherans," *Time*, October 18, 1943, 46, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,778024,00.html>.

³⁰ Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke, a World Listened: The Story of Walter A. Maier* (New York: McGraw, 1963), 325.

³¹ Letter to Henry W. Buck, May 25, 1945, Maier Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

pointed out that a universal gospel is just that. The gospel crosses not only geographical and political obstacles, but also those of race and color.

Additionally, Maier had no love for Nazism or for the various forms of American racism. In his sermon "God will Provide," Maier scolded:

The Nazi treatment of the Jew is repulsive, but how did we treat the American Indians. We fed them whiskey, cheated them, took their lands away and locked them on reservations! What have we done to the American Negro? Try to have a colored boy enrolled in some of our upper schools, and you will find part of the answer.³²

In a 1947 sermon, "The Prayer God Answers," Maier linked his condemnation of racism to his proclamation of objective reconciliation in Christ:

Jesus has sin-destroying mercy; He not only forgives your transgressions, forgets them, He actually wipes them out of existence. Jesus has completed redemption. His deliverance is not a possible blessing, which may be offered some time in the future, but a priceless reality, which is here for you now. Jesus—praise His saving name!—has all-inclusive deliverance, with no one excluded by class, color or condition.³³

Militarism

Throughout his public ministry, Maier walked the narrow line between pacifism and militarism, because the latter, the philosophy that "might makes right," nurtured an ungodly spirit of revenge. In his sermon "Pray America Pray," Maier took aim at American manufacturers who enjoyed producing war material.³⁴ In his prayer at the November 5, 1942, session of the House of Representatives, Maier warned of the spirit of militarism that profited from human bloodshed.

With his realistic understanding of the power of sin in the world, Maier acknowledged that force must at times be used to counteract force. He pointed out, however, that force must never be at the expense of the forgiving spirit that the gospel implants in an evangelistic heart. He said:

While we despise tyranny, dictatorships, oppression, militarism, aggression, totalitarianism in every form; while we must be ready to defend our nation with all our possessions, and, if need be, with life itself,

³² Walter A. Maier, *Peace through Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1940), 193.

³³ Walter A. Maier, *One Thousand Radio Voices For Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 188.

³⁴ Maier, *Peace through Christ*, 26.

we cannot, would we be true to Christ, hate our fellow men, even though we must battle against them.³⁵

Maier had continually sought a National Day of Repentance and Humiliation, similar to that which Abraham Lincoln instituted during the Civil War. Thinking of himself as a prophet to the nation, he noted the nation's sins of thanklessness, pride, and hypocrisy. He spoke out against the futility of trying to stockpile chemical and atomic weapons. In his 1948 sermon, "Christ's Peace For You," which was heard on Memorial Day and closed the fifteenth season of the Lutheran Hour, he invited and pleaded with his listeners to give their allegiance to the Prince of Peace.³⁶

XII. Mixing Gospel Proclamation with Politics: His Response to Father Coughlin

Beginning in the late 1920s, Father Charles E. Coughlin had a Sunday afternoon radio broadcast from his parish, Shrine of the Little Flower, in Royal Oak, Michigan, a Detroit suburb. By 1945, he had a listening audience of 45 million. Twice he made the cover of *Newsweek*. Coughlin's broadcasts were a mixture of religious and political themes. He sometimes spoke of the perils of communism that he labeled the "red serpent," or he pleaded for the remonetization of silver. He also spoke scathingly of "unregulated capitalism."

For a time, Coughlin was considered to be so politically powerful that his phrase "Roosevelt or Ruin" was thought to have been partially responsible for gaining Franklin D. Roosevelt the presidency. Coughlin had his own political lobby of five million members, and he succeeded in flooding Congress with two hundred thousand telegrams as a result of one speech. Yet he eventually had the reputation of being anti-Semitic because of a pro-Nazi speech he broadcast in 1938. The National Association of Broadcasters eventually drafted a strict new code with him in mind. The code prohibited all "controversial speakers from buying air time on the radio unless they appeared on a panel and other views were also presented."

By 1942, Coughlin's own archbishop pressured him to stop broadcasting. Prior to that, however, Coughlin was a radio force in religious broadcasting worthy to be opposed both by articles in the *Walther League Messenger* and by allusions in Lutheran Hour radio sermons.

³⁵ Walter A. Maier, *For Christ and Country* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), 128.

³⁶ Walter A. Maier, *Go Quickly And Tell* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 369-370.

Avoiding any direct reference to Coughlin, and thereby staying within the National Association of Broadcasters' code, Maier supplied his listeners with code words that the educated listener could easily decipher as a reference to Father Coughlin.

Maier felt that his militant attack on Coughlin was on behalf of the church's true mission, which, Maier said, "First and last centers on men's souls. Its ultimate objective lies not in this life, but in the next. It must never preach hatred, force, war, but always, love, mercy and peace."³⁷ In his October 16, 1949, sermon, "Is the United States a Christian Nation," Maier said:

I concur in the opinion of President Ulysses S. Grant, who gave this pointed direction: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and the state forever separate."³⁸

Though Maier condemned Father Coughlin for putting the pulpit into partisan politics, Maier warned *Walther League Messenger* readers not to neglect their civic duties. He criticized what he viewed as a lack of political activism on the part of his fellow Lutherans.³⁹

Though attacking Father Coughlin for misusing the privilege of radio preaching, Maier also attacked anyone who attempted to remove Coughlin from the airwaves. Maier spoke out strongly on behalf of religious freedom, which he saw as connected with the policy of a strict separation of church and state. Maier held that religious freedom was guaranteed by the American constitution, and he defended that freedom even for those with whom he had sharp theological disagreement, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

XIII. Maier's Ecumenical Outreach

Throughout his career, Maier sought to use his Lutheran Hour sermons as an instrument for the repositioning of Lutheranism in the center of a revitalized conservative Christianity. Despite the fear that contact with heterodox Christians might result in the LCMS being guilty of unionism, Maier encouraged the LCMS pastors to accept speaking engagements before non-Lutheran groups that requested it.

Maier was not content to lend support to unity among conservative Christians simply by writing letters or lending encouragement through

³⁷ Walter A. Maier, *The Cross From Coast to Coast* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), 330.

³⁸ Unpublished Lutheran Hour Sermon, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

³⁹ Walter A. Maier, "Hollow Liberty," *Walther League Messenger* 44 (1936), 649.

Lutheran Hour sermons. He also made personal appearances before non-Lutheran assemblies such as at the summer Bible conferences at Winona Lake, Indiana. These appearances, however, created quite a bit of negative reaction among some members of the LCMS. Because of it, Concordia Seminary's governing board required him to defend himself against the charge of having violated the LCMS stance against religious unionism. Moreover, the LCMS Board of Directors may have removed him from his position as Lutheran Hour speaker had not his unexpected death in 1950 come first.

XIV. Maier's Link to Billy Sunday and Billy Graham

Within his lifetime, this small-in-stature, blond, and blue-eyed radio-evangelist was known as a representative of an "athletic Christianity." *Colliers* described him as a "high-tension, athletic clergyman who looks more like a prosperous businessman than a preacher."⁴⁰ The magazine said, "Most ministers today would be afraid to 'burn 'em up' as Doctor Maier does, scolding and exhorting sinners to repentance, but his public seems to like it. Fan mail pours in from the religious and antireligious alike."⁴¹ A featured article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, "The Man of the Lutheran Hour," described his appearance and sermon delivery as similar to that of fighter in a prize ring whose heart-to-heart direct delivery takes a hold on his audience.⁴² Maier was also characterized as a friendly person who conveyed a "common man" image. He was known for his good hard handshakes, photographic memory, and tremendous capacity for work. People who met him did not soon forget him. Commenting on the upcoming March 11 Lutheran Hour rally in Chicago, the *Chicago Herald American* wrote, "In the keynote address Dr. Walter A. Maier, noted Lutheran hour radio speaker and widely known as the modern Billy Sunday, will sound a call to America for repentance."⁴³

Maier often called the Lutheran Hour "our mission of the air," or "our radio crusade." As a radio evangelist, Maier sought to bring people, as he said, "all the way to Christ." He condemned the theological heresy known as universalism, the error that there is salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ Maier always spoke of Jesus' vicarious atonement as already accomplishing full salvation for all sinners when he died on the cross. Maier would quickly add, however, that an individual benefited

⁴⁰ *Colliers*, May 6, 1944.

⁴¹ *Colliers*, May 6, 1944.

⁴² *Saturday Evening Post*, June 19, 1948.

⁴³ *Chicago Herald American*, March 10, 1945 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ In, e.g., "You Can Abide Forever," *One Thousand Radio Voices For Christ*, 285.

personally by this salvation only "when" and "if" that sinner believed the gospel. Thus, Maier's sermons had a strong emphasis on what theologians call "subjective justification." This emphasis is one of the most controversial and dangerous parts of the Maier sermons, in light of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and Lutheran opposition to synergism.

Maier's sermons had many indirect and direct invitations to listeners to "come to Christ," "accept Christ," and "decide for Christ." In his 1931 Maundy Thursday sermon entitled, "The Inevitable Question," Maier made the assertion that no one can get around making a decision for or against Christ. He said that the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" must be answered personally, directly, unavoidably, by everyone who has ever met Christ through the Scriptures.⁴⁵ Explicit references to the necessity of the Holy Spirit's aid in "accepting Christ" became more frequent in Maier's sermons in the late 1940s.⁴⁶

Invitation language is frequent in Maier's sermons. During the twelfth season of the Lutheran Hour, his sermon "Don't Gamble Your Soul Away!" consisted of two parts: "Don't Take the Fatal Chance of Rejecting Christ!" and "Be sure that you have accepted Christ!"⁴⁷ In the thirteenth season of broadcasting, in his 1946 sermon, "Marred Lives Remade in Christ," Maier closed with the "Invitation." Prior to the "Invitation," Maier told of a successful businessman who supposedly told his pastor, "You warmed my heart with a desire for what you preached; and then—you stopped without asking me to do something about it. In my business the important thing is to get them to sign on the dotted line." Because Maier did not want to be guilty of that omission, he said to his broadcast listeners:

I beseech you to believe that I am speaking to every one of you still without the Savior when I plead: For God's sake, for Christ's sake, for your own soul's sake, for your family's and friends' sake, kneel down (don't be ashamed to fall on your knees now in front of your radio, before God!) and, looking toward Christ and His cross, cry out: "O Jesus, I am nothing but cheap, common, corrupt clay; yet Thou didst suffer and die to purify and refine me *by faith*. As I now confess Thee my own, washed and cleansed in Thy blood, let Thy Spirit take me, make me, shape me, so that my sin-marred life will be remade according to the perfect pattern of

⁴⁵ Walter A. Maier, *The Lutheran Hour* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931), 143, 144-146, 148.

⁴⁶ See Walter A. Maier, *Global Broadcasts of His Grace* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), 131-132.

⁴⁷ Walter A. Maier, *Rebuilding with Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), 98-115.

Thine own self, O Blessed Savior!"—That prayer will surely be answered.⁴⁸

On December 25, 1949, in his last Lutheran Hour sermon, "Heaven's Love Lies in the Manger," Maier called listeners to participate in Jesus' complete atonement through faith. This is how he said it:

The Lord of this heavenly love who lies as a Babe in Bethlehem's manger wants to grant you the divine promise of complete pardon as the Christmas gift of His grace, so that you need only believe the guarantee of your salvation, which the Son of God now offers every one of you.⁴⁹

Maier's qualifying statement "you need only believe," while employed by him to guard against the error of universalism, focused the listeners' attention upon what was expected of them. But, according to confessional Lutheran theology, preachers are to place listeners' attention upon what God has already done for them. The grammar of the Maier sermons was full of imperatives and exhortations—grammatical forms that lend themselves to the area of ethics and sanctification. Objective justification, the center of gospel proclamation, typically uses the indicative form of verbs to stress the gift-nature of salvation.

In light of the past LCMS controversies regarding the doctrines of election and justification, one would have expected Maier to have exhibited a greater sensitivity to the importance of stressing objective justification. By doing so, he would have clearly separated himself from the theological errors of past revivalist preachers who were influenced by the free-will stress in Arminianism. It is one of the tragedies of Maier's sudden death that he had not produced at least a monograph detailing how he avoided the Arminianism implicit in the revivalists' "Gospel invitations." It may have been that he recognized that his skills lay more in theological projection rather than reflection, and that his strengths were in organization and practical exegesis rather than in systematic theology.

Surprisingly, by this time some in the LCMS leadership were no longer sensitive to the theological implications of such "accept Jesus" language and the theological synergism implicit in the use of such invitations. Evidence of a lack of such sensitivity and theological sophistication is recorded in the memorial address delivered by LCMS President John Behnken for the deceased Maier over the Lutheran Hour network on January 15, 1950. In his sermon, "Christ, Your Matchless Advocate,"

⁴⁸ Walter A. Maier, *He Will Abundantly Pardon* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948), 100–101 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Unpublished Lutheran Hour Sermons, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

Behnken asked his listeners, "Will you not accept Christ as your matchless Advocate?"⁵⁰ But Behnken's sermon made no mention of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, who gives such trust as a pure gift to the sinner. Behnken, though critical of Maier upon some issues, such as his contacts with Christian groups not in fellowship with the LCMS, nevertheless praised him for his faith and even attempted to imitate the style and content of Maier's sermons in this memorial sermon.

When Billy Sunday died, Maier commented on him in a December 1935 *Messenger* article: "The nation lost one of the best preachers. . . . His preaching and methods always offered a subject for acrid debate. Few men in the pulpit have been more systematically and perhaps more unjustly criticized than he."⁵¹ Sunday and Maier had much in common, not only in physical stature and an "athletic" preaching style and genius for organizing crusades/rallies, but also in their ethical concerns and transparent patriotism. Sunday had often equated Christianity and Patriotism, and claimed that "hell and traitors are synonyms."⁵² Lutheran Hour Rallies prominently displayed an American flag and a Christian flag side by side.

After a series of heart attacks, Maier died on January 11, 1950. As he had spoken well of Billy Sunday upon his death, Billy Graham would do the same for Maier. In January of 1950, while at a Boston hotel with his evangelism team, Graham heard of Maier's death. Graham and his evangelism team prayed that someone be raised to take Maier's place. In 1963, Graham wrote these words to Maier's widow: "Indeed, I loved your husband in Christ as few men. I can hear his voice ringing in my ears to this day. I have his books on my shelf and often read them and even yet will use material from them in my own sermons. What a giant in the faith he was!"⁵³

Walter A. Maier was indeed the Missouri Synod's historical link with the characteristics of American Evangelicalism: militant, evangelistic, ecumenical, and socially conscious. He, like Billy Sunday and then Billy Graham, came with a new sophisticated style of outreach to the converted and unconverted. All of these evangelists promulgated their message through highly organized large rallies and modern media techniques that included sophisticated advertising.

⁵⁰ Unpublished Lutheran Hour Sermon, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis.

⁵¹ *Walther League Messenger* 44 (1936): 205.

⁵² Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 175.

⁵³ *Decision* (June, 1981).

Maier was among the young leadership that moved the LCMS into a fuller participation with other American conservative Christians and into mainstream American culture. His successes finally gave to the LCMS, originally an immigrant, German-focused church body, a seductive prominence and desire for acceptance in the world of theological scholarship and ecumenical outreach.⁵⁴

Historian James P. Eckman has noted that whereas the Puritans of the seventeenth century, like Luther, focused on a God-centered theology that stressed man's inability to save himself, the early nineteenth century embraced a man-centered theology that emphasized the free will and ability of man in salvation. That emphasis continued into the twentieth century, with an added emphasis on method and technology.⁵⁵ Theology, whether it is confessional Lutheran or classical Calvinism, seemed to be less important to many of the twentieth century evangelists than it did to their predecessors. But such a lack of emphasis carries tremendous dangers. Certainly financial wisdom and various media tools can be valuable servants in evangelism. Nevertheless, to borrow the architect's axiom "form follows function," the assumptions and consequences arising from too much dependence upon modern media or business techniques (and their views on what constitutes "success") must be evaluated theologically. This requires leaders and preachers of the Missouri Synod to examine closely the dangers such methods present to a confessional Lutheran Church on the American landscape.

⁵⁴ Crucial to his success was the loyal work of his assistants Eugene R. Bertermann (d. 1983) and Harriet Schwenk Kluver (d. 1988).

⁵⁵ Eckman, *Perspectives From Church History*, 84.