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# “A [Radio] Tower of Strength”: Walter A. Maier, Broadcasting, and Gospel Proclamation

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**Abstract:** In the first half of the twentieth century, Walter A. Maier embraced the new medium of radio to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to millions of listeners in the United States and around the world. His tenacity in achieving and maintaining access to radio airwaves, especially over rapidly expanding networks, and his powerful preaching of biblical orthodoxy bore abundant fruit. Erudition and eloquence, combined with contextualized Christian substance, kept audiences tuning in week after week in the most turbulent of times. Maier’s remarkably successful evangelistic and pastoral efforts offer an instructive model to the twenty-first century church as it faces our complex, multi-media world.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Anglican cleric and school master Henry James Buckoll translated a number of German hymns into English. When he got to Martin Luther’s “Ein feste Burg,” Buckoll rendered the first line as: “A tower of strength our God doth stand, a shield and sure defender.”<sup>1</sup> The devout wordsmith could not have known that his imagery had a remarkable, anticipatory quality to it. In the following century, it seems that the “towers of strength” most associated with the presence of the Almighty were of the radio transmission variety, and they were to become ubiquitous. While Gospel proclamation over the airwaves would eventually become a global enterprise, it got its start with the advent of commercial radio in the United States in the early 1920s. Americans embraced religious radio, and it flourished in the decades that followed, due in no small part to the energetic weekly preaching of an erudite Lutheran professor in St. Louis: the Reverend Doctor Walter A. Maier.

In his Large Catechism, Luther explained that the “Thy kingdom come” petition in the Lord’s Prayer was a request for faithfulness so that the Gospel would “gain



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recognition and followers among other people . . . so . . . that, led by the Holy Spirit, many may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of salvation.”<sup>2</sup> Walter Maier not only exhibited such faithfulness, but he wanted to share it with the rest of the world. From early on, he recognized radio as a vehicle by which the Word of God could be so proclaimed, and through which the Holy Spirit could produce faith in the lost and edify the found. Equally important, just as Luther had employed the emerging print medium to broadly proclaim Gospel truths to counter corruption of genuine Christian orthodoxy—especially within the church—Maier used the broadcast medium to speak against doctrinal erosion and variations of unbelief, from both ecclesiastical and secular sources, to millions of searching souls. His story and the history surrounding it is worthy of our attention as the church of the twenty-first century responds to similar, though often more pronounced, challenges, and the complex opportunities they present.

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## Radio and Gospel Proclamation

On November 2, 1920, Westinghouse’s newly-licensed radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, went on the air announcing the Harding-Cox Presidential election results. It was estimated that the listener tally was between only five hundred and a thousand, but the following morning callers to Westinghouse’s switchboard asked how to acquire radios.<sup>3</sup> From that start, KDKA began regular daily programming, and commercial broadcasting was born. Reaction by new broadcasters and new radio listeners was swift. Additional broadcasting stations went on the air the following year, and more than five hundred new stations began operations in 1922. Expenditures by Americans buying radio parts and sets soared, as they embraced this new source of information and entertainment. This trajectory continued throughout the coming decades. By the beginning of the 1930s, 40 percent of households owned a radio—a number that would rise to nearly 90 percent by the close of the decade. Radio historian, Bruce Lenthall, contextualizes this statistic: “In 1940 more families had radios than had cars, telephones, electricity, or plumbing.”<sup>4</sup> Average daily listening exceeded four and a half hours.<sup>5</sup> In short, radio became a central component of American culture, and it did so with remarkable rapidity.

From the beginning, religious broadcasts comprised an important element of this cultural force. Within weeks of inaugurating the airwaves, KDKA broadcast the 1921 New Year service of Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh. With KDKA

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engineers—one Catholic and one Jewish—near the pulpit donning choir robes, the sounds of the entire service were beamed over the winter air. The broadcast “went over splendidly,” as indicated by the positive response the station and the church received. One shut-in in Massachusetts wrote to say that “she could scarcely believe her ears when the organ music and choir sounded” and that the “voice of the pastor thrilled me as few things have in the long-suffering years.” She added, “at the end [I] felt at peace with the world, ‘the peace that passeth all understanding.’”<sup>6</sup>

The idea of religious broadcasting caught on, and in December 1921 the Church of the Covenant of Washington, DC, pursued and received the first radio broadcast license issued to a religious organization. Months later, Calvary Baptist Church, one of New York City’s oldest congregations, began radio broadcasts. Expressing the hopefulness of many radio preachers who would follow, the church’s pastor, the Reverend John Roach Stratton, declared, “I shall try to continue doing my part . . . tearing down the strongholds of Satan, and I hope that our radio system will prove so efficient that when I twist the Devil’s tail in New York, his squawk will be heard across the continent.”<sup>7</sup> By 1923, ten ecclesiastically-related organizations had stations up and running. According to the Federal Radio Commission, sixty Christian radio licenses had been issued by 1928, most of which were granted to evangelistically-minded churches. While many religious broadcasters would later shut down during the Great Depression, religious broadcasting had established itself as a substantive, lasting component of American airwaves.<sup>8</sup>

Because few mainline Protestant churches owned and operated radio stations, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ encouraged its local ecclesiastical councils to forge cooperative radio ministries and to seek access to local stations for broadcasting opportunities. One such cooperative effort in the New York area began in 1923 and featured noted Brooklyn preacher S. Parkes Cadman. His popularity led NBC to make this a weekly network broadcast named *National Radio Pulpit*, when the network was formed three years later. The *Pulpit* became the first religious broadcast to originate from a studio rather than from a remote, church location, when NBC asked Cadman to broadcast from its network facilities in 1928. From the beginning, NBC offered religious groups sustaining, i.e., free, airtime, soon adding Catholic and Jewish offerings to its Protestant programming. When CBS formed in 1927, it initially sold airtime to preachers seeking a network audience, primarily as a means to generate much-needed revenue. The politically charged rhetoric of one such preacher, Father Charles Coughlin, caused the network’s executives to rethink this policy and cease selling airtime for religious programming in 1931. At that time, CBS adopted a similar policy to NBC and offered sustaining time to mainline preachers deemed non-sectarian. The Mutual Broadcasting System came along in 1934, and it provided *only* purchased time to religious broadcasters. Though it would eventually scale back religious programming, one-fourth of Mutual’s revenues came from religious broadcasts in the early 1940s. The two most visible such programs

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were Walter Maier’s *The Lutheran Hour* and Charles Fuller’s *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour*. When NBC spun off its Blue Network, resulting in the formation of ABC in 1943, ABC management also adopted a policy of offering sustaining time primarily to mainline Protestant groups—a policy it maintained until the late 1940s.<sup>9</sup>

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Whether over local stations or via national networks, outreach-minded clergy took their messages beyond the confines of their church sanctuaries from the earliest days of the radio medium. For those effective preachers who obtained access to network microphones, either by sustaining time or through purchased access, loyal listener bases developed and grew, stretching from coast to coast and, in several cases, lasting for decades.

### **WAM!—A Lutheran on Radio**

Walter A. Maier energetically pursued radio broadcasting as a Gospel medium from the early 1920s. Less than a year after KDKA had birthed commercial radio, Maier was contemplating the establishment of a Lutheran radio station.

Maier first stepped in front of a radio microphone in mid-1922, when he addressed the annual convention of the Walther League in Louisville. As he experienced firsthand the technological reality of projecting his Gospel message beyond the walls surrounding young Lutherans in their Kentucky meeting hall to varied listeners in varied locales wearing crude headphones attached to crystal sets, Maier’s enthusiasm for the medium only grew.<sup>10</sup> In March of the following year, Maier penned an editorial for *The Walther League Messenger*, entitled “Why Not a Lutheran Broadcasting Station?” Maier began by stating that he had been listening to broadcasts over his own receiver and was not pleased with what he heard. Scientific lectures “made our ears tingle” as they “insult[ed] . . . Biblical Christianity.” He warned of the “wishy-washy moral talks, misnamed sermons” that were regular fare. A Lutheran station to “send a one hundred per cent Gospel message from coast to coast,” and eventually “even to Europe,” could serve as a necessary countermeasure, argued Maier. With uncharacteristic understatement, he declared, “It seems that the radio sermon is destined to play a somewhat important role in American life.”

Interestingly, in a rhetorical move meant to both compliment a perceived ecclesiastical competitor and to prime the competitive juices of his fellow Lutherans, Maier noted that the Catholic Church had already recognized radio's potential. He directly quoted from a current issue of *Catholic World* that had advocated for a Catholic "wireless transmitting station." Its author had argued that such an ethereal venture would "reach untold millions at the very poles of the world," would issue "a swift reply to every calumny against the church," and plant the "seed of further conversions." Maier's implication was clear: if the Catholics could wield this new tool, why not those who "can bring the message of pure Lutheran Christianity?" Such would "offer a powerful and effective antidote against the many and varied forms of unbelief" that were becoming more prevalent. Maier pointed to the potential to reach souls that the Lutheran Church would not reach otherwise, and to do so in a "least expensive" manner. And, displaying a self-awareness not possessed by many American Lutherans at that time, Maier promised that radio could "assist us in removing the misunderstanding which makes people view our faith as that of a foreign church."<sup>11</sup>

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In February 1923, Richard Kretschmar, Chairman of the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, backed by a recent addition to the faculty, Walter Maier, proposed the launch of a radio station. The board approved the proposal, but it was a hollow victory since no funds were appropriated for actual implementation.<sup>12</sup> Faculty support for a radio station was mixed. While there were indeed supporters, practical considerations such as financial constraints and the long-term viability of radio itself worried some faculty members.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, many were tepid because of their own uncertainty as to the Lutherans' place in American Christianity. During this period, many Lutherans—theologians, pastors, and laymen—wrestled with the trade-offs between neat denominational boundaries and broader evangelistic opportunities on the American field. In other words, even if practical constraints could be overcome, some questioned whether Lutherans, or the LCMS more specifically, *should* step further into the religious "marketplace" with a new medium "widely employed in the secular, commercial world," or whether such work should be left to more domestically-oriented church bodies.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, faculty reservations were overcome, however, and "seed" funding was secured.<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1924, contracts were signed for the purchase of a 500-watt transmitter, and broadcasting towers were erected on Concordia Seminary's campus. Makeshift studios were installed in the attic of one of the seminary

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buildings. In honor of the Walther League’s foundational aid, and to affirm linkage of the station to the seminary, Maier and his colleagues requested that the Federal Radio Commission grant the new station the call letters “WLCS,” standing for “Walther League—Concordia Seminary.” However, the federal regulators had already adopted the policy that stations west of the Mississippi River would receive call letters beginning with “K.” The Commission assigned the letters “KFUO” to the Lutheran station. Recognizing the appeal of giving these letters a higher meaning than just an ethereal identifier, Maier declared that they would henceforth mean: “Keep Forward Upward Onward.”<sup>16</sup>

KFUO’s entry into radio airwaves occurred on October 26, 1924, as the festivities around the cornerstone laying of Concordia Seminary’s new campus in Clayton (on the west side of St. Louis) were broadcast via an improvised hookup. The official dedication of KFUO’s studio occurred as the station went on the air at 9:15 p.m. on Sunday, December 14, of the same year.<sup>17</sup>

Maier carried a number of “on air” duties for the young radio station and worked with its first full-time station manager, Herman H. Hohenstein, to solidify KFUO’s viability. Hohenstein was a young St. Louis pastor who took the newly-created position in early 1925 as a ministerial “call.” When Rev. Hohenstein accepted these new responsibilities, the progressive *Christian Century* magazine—no bedfellow with a denomination it considered isolated and uninfluential—could not help but take note. Under the heading, “He Leads the Way,” its editors noted that a pastoral appointment as a radio station manager “is said to be the first appointment of its kind in Protestant history.” They concluded, “Mr. Hohenstein seems to be in line for remembrance as a pioneer in a new type of Christian ministry.”<sup>18</sup> Part of such pioneering included expansion of KFUO’s programming. While KFUO was unmistakably a Lutheran endeavor, as the breadth of programs and speakers expanded, Maier and his colleagues maintained a strict policy that he would effectively take with him to *The Lutheran Hour* in the years to come: “We do not use the radio for direct attacks on sectarian or Catholic Churches.”<sup>19</sup>

While Maier was not the only person who led the efforts to launch a Lutheran radio station, he was at the center. His strong Walther League ties and the numerous, abiding connections they provided, his enthusiastic entry into the Concordia Seminary faculty and rapid establishment of key allies for the radio project, his expanding relationship with the Lutheran Laymen’s League (LLL), and his natural talent as a communicator all served as vital assets in the establishment of KFUO as an

More importantly, within a denomination not known for nimbleness and innovation, Maier had placed Lutheranism on the forefront of Christian radio during its infancy.

effective venture. Lutheran historian, Alan Graebner, noted that no individual had dominated KFUE programming in its early day; however, “by the close of the Twenties the auditioning time was over.” By “a combination of talent and drive,” Walter Maier “emerged” to become the personification of “Lutheran radio.”<sup>20</sup> More importantly, within a denomination not known for nimbleness and innovation, Maier had placed Lutheranism on the forefront of Christian radio during its infancy.

In June 1927, the *Walther League Messenger* celebrated the history of KFUE since its conception a few short years earlier. In hyperbole, of which Maier, as the periodical’s editor, must have at least tacitly accepted, one of the article’s authors provided a verbal tour of KFUE facilities to the reader:

Turning our eyes toward the slowly setting sun, we see . . . two higher towers . . . lifting their heads two hundred feet into the air. . . . How slender, yet how stately and inspiring! Seemingly so frail, apparently at the mercy of the elements, yet well-built of strong and lasting material, firmly anchored in a solid mass of concrete, fully able to withstand wind and weather. And withal, how significant! Fit emblems of the Church of Christ, which they serve! Just so the Church, seemingly so weak and helpless, yet is insuperably strong, grounded, on and anchored in, the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, rearing its head high into the air to proclaim the Gospel of peace; a source of inspiration, yea, salvation, to the millions of men, drawing earth-born, sin-cursed mortals heavenward to the realms of eternal glory on high.<sup>21</sup>

The “Towers of Strength” erected in St. Louis would soon be augmented by “Towers of Strength” co-opted by Maier across the country.

One additional point must be made about these early days of Lutheran radio. While Maier’s visionary role and energetic leadership in KFUE’s founding—and eventually in network broadcasting—should be recognized for what they were, he likely benefited from the fact that LCMS denominational leaders initially paid minimal attention to the evangelistic possibilities offered by a fledgling radio industry. Thus, one can speculate that Maier’s new ventures were effectively “below the radar,” perceived as a relatively small matter, allowing him to avoid getting bogged down in the synod’s often-ponderous administrative and theological bureaucracy. As

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*The Lutheran Hour* (TLH) eventually grew to global stature, this precedential “asset” would prove invaluable to Maier.

## To the Networks

As Maier sought a larger platform for proclamation, he approached NBC about the possibility of adding Lutheran programming to their sustaining time religious menu. NBC reaffirmed that their Protestant time slot would remain under the gate-keeping of the Greater New York Council of Churches/Federal Council of Churches. Given the liberal leanings of these mainline churches, and in light of NBC’s policy against selling airtime for religious broadcasts, Maier knew he would need an alternate route to network airwaves. In fact, mainline leaders such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the leading preachers on NBC’s Protestant sustaining time broadcasts, were influential in convincing NBC (and soon CBS) to reject all paid religious programming. Fosdick (and likeminded progressive Protestant leaders) feared that “belated forms of denominational organization”—his term for more conservative, doctrinally rigid church bodies—would glean an undeserved respectability for their brand of traditional Christianity should they gain a share in network microphones.<sup>22</sup> The Federal Council of Churches went so far as to push contractual obligations on local radio stations to air only religious broadcasts that they controlled.<sup>23</sup>

At the conclusion of Maier’s meeting at NBC, one of the network representatives struck a nerve by inadvertently highlighting the peripheral nature of American Lutheranism, thereby increasing Maier’s resolve to break out of traditional Lutheran confines. The NBC employee inquired, “Do you really think a Lutheran sermon is suited for the broad American public?” Before Maier could reply, he added, “Isn’t Lutheranism primarily for Germans?” Maier assured the NBC executives that there would be nothing so parochial about his proposed radio messages, even though the founder of Lutheranism had been a German. He must have been at least somewhat persuasive, as the NBC personnel left open the possibility of his periodic participation in their Protestant sustaining time programming; however, this only convinced Maier further that a *regular* program was needed to spread his Gospel messages.<sup>24</sup>

In turn, Maier gained an audience with executives of the smaller, newer CBS network. Unlike NBC, CBS had accepted paid religious programming from its inception. The pioneering Presbyterian, Donald Grey Barnhouse, had become the first preacher to purchase network airtime when he entered into a contract with CBS in 1928.<sup>25</sup> Yet by the time Maier met with CBS personnel, the network was in the process of adopting a policy of eliminating paid religious programming. This shift was partially in response to the aforementioned pressure from progressive Protestants, such as the Federal Council of Churches, and partially in response to the

politically-charged radio preaching of Father Coughlin on the network.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, until such policy was solidified, CBS executives were willing to consider selling Maier network access.

Specifically, they agreed to sell him airtime at standard commercial rates—the then-staggering sum of \$4,500 per weekly, half-hour timeslot, which would exceed \$200,000 over an entire year of broadcasts.<sup>27</sup> (Given such realities, Maier concluded that “our Lutheran Radio Hour has now become the Lutheran Half-Hour.” Indeed, *TLH* was a 30-minute program from its inception, notwithstanding its name.)<sup>28</sup> To place such amounts in perspective, CBS’s proposed weekly remuneration demands were roughly three times the average weekly funding required for Professor Maier’s employer, Concordia Seminary, to maintain its entire operation during the same year, 1930.<sup>29</sup>

Maier immediately approached the Lutheran Laymen’s League. While the LLL had stepped up to help fund KFUE’s Gospel-broadcasting venture, its leadership was not content to offer the blessings of Lutheranism over just a single station. In its membership periodical, LLL editors touted the “greater opportunities . . . beckon[ing]” from “the chain systems of broadcasting”—opportunities that “national advertisers” already “realiz[ed].” In a clear reference to NBC’s Protestant sustaining time slot, they warned that “the Federal Council of Churches, which is under Modernist control,” already sponsored “speakers of great charm and profound learning” who “are engaged for the purpose of bringing the Modernist view of Christianity into hundreds of thousands of American homes.” They mentioned approvingly Presbyterian Barnhouse’s willingness to counter the “modernistic message” by purchasing network airtime. They concluded that Lutherans should fill the critical void for “a spiritually hungry multitude crying out for better food than is now being offered to them.”<sup>30</sup>

So, when Walter Maier presented the opportunity to purchase network airtime, the LLL was ready to respond. LLL leadership held Maier in high regard, and its board of directors included several of his personal friends. On May 31, 1930, the national convention of the League, meeting at Chicago’s Palmer House, adopted a resolution “to sponsor a national Lutheran Radio Hour over the Columbia Broadcasting System beginning in the fall.”<sup>31</sup>

As the country staggered from the 1929 stock market crash and its aftermath, Maier was convinced that the time was right for straightforward preaching of the Christian message. Out of concern that religious

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broadcasts could conflict with, or serve as a substitute for, Sunday worship services, a Thursday evening time slot was selected. On October 2, 1930, in the 10 p.m. (Eastern) time slot immediately following CBS’s popular *The Shadow*, Maier took to the airwaves from CBS affiliate WHK in Cleveland, transmitted to thirty-six network stations, coast to coast. (The Cleveland location was used so as to feature the Cleveland Bach Chorus in the inaugural program’s music selections.)<sup>32</sup>

CBS executives soon concluded that *TLH* was a viable program. After the initial broadcasts, listeners had sent in over fifteen thousand letters, many to CBS’s New York headquarters. In just eight weeks, more mail would be sent to *TLH* than to any other religious program, including those sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches, such as the four-year-old *National Radio Pulpit*, featuring the Protestant progressives, Fosdick, S. Parkes Cadman, and Ralph W. Sockman.<sup>33</sup>

Over eight hundred newspapers gave coverage to *TLH* during its first few weeks, with the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *New York Post*, and the *New York Times* frequently recommending the program.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the *Times* highlighted Maier and *TLH* in their “Outstanding Events on the Air Today” listings after *TLH*’s October debut.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the *Herald Tribune* featured a complete “Today’s Radio Programs” page in its daily publication. Like the *Times*, its editors deemed approximately fifteen programs worthy of special note under the listing, “Bright Spots for Today.” Maier and *TLH* soon received top billing in this column as well.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that the large majority of programs to which these newspapers directed special attention were entertainment or informational in content rather than religious.

Even with *TLH*’s enthusiastic reception, the realities of the Great Depression could not be ignored as its first *TLH* season drew to a close. Insufficient funding forced Maier reluctantly to withdraw from national broadcasts. He wrote, “It seems to us that an effort so signally directed to the fulfillment of the Savior’s last commission to His Church, ‘Preach the Gospel to every creature,’ must continue.”<sup>37</sup> Though he did not know when it would occur, Maier expressed confidence that *TLH* would eventually return. The wait would be 3½ years.

In the interim, Maier accepted multiple invitations to preach on local broadcasts sponsored by the Detroit Lutheran Pastoral Conference. As Maier, the LLL, and the Detroit pastors continued to explore ways to re-launch *TLH*, Maier was introduced to the Danish-born president of the Chevrolet division of General Motors—William S. Knudsen.<sup>38</sup> As a Lutheran layman, Knudsen lamented the effect of the Great Depression on the American people. He agreed to underwrite an entire proposed, new season of *TLH*, with the following directive to Maier, “Now you teach the people to look up to God—they’ve been looking down too much nowadays.” As it turned out, enough donations were gathered, especially from individuals responding

to the radio messages, so that Knudsen did not have to make good on his financial guarantee.<sup>39</sup>

On February 10, 1935, *TLH* returned to the airwaves, over a portion of the new Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS). At that time, MBS covered 75 percent of the nation and boasted the world's strongest station (WLW in Cincinnati) as an affiliate. *TLH* was on the air via eleven stations for the remainder of that partial radio season and would return for the full following season and all subsequent seasons. Later that year, Maier reflected, "After the first program it was evident that the blessings of the Lord were to rest upon the entire project to an astonishing degree."<sup>40</sup> For the remainder of the 1930s, *TLH* gained true coast-to-coast penetration as MBS continued to add affiliates and as *TLH* served as a pioneer in the use of transcription disks for non-network stations that could not carry the program live.<sup>41</sup> Even with the lingering hardships of the Great Depression, listener donations and LLL supporters covered the production and broadcasting costs, and they would do so for generations to come.

### **The Message and Impact**

Over a twenty-year period, millions of people tuned in every week to hear Walter Maier on *TLH*. His program was produced with consistent formats and high quality. He honed his oratorical skills for maximum impact on his listeners. But it was *what* he had to say that kept his ethereal congregants, across the country and around the world, huddled around their radio sets. Amid increasing individualism and uncertain opinions, many wanted to hear words of immutable authority. Amid rising Modernity, many wanted to hear affirmation of traditional orthodoxy. Amid national and international strife, many wanted to hear a message of providential stability and hope, even if it came with blunt admonition. Amid religious fragmentation, many wanted to hear words creating a shared Christian community. Maier delivered messages that provided just these elements.

It was *what* he had to say that kept his ethereal congregants, across the country and around the world, huddled around their radio sets. . . . His mission of truth, however, faced a problem as he went on the air in 1930. Enduring truth was falling out of fashion.

A thorough review of Maier's radio sermons reveals a remarkable richness of content. The Jesus Christ for whom Walter Maier labored once said to His followers, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32 NKJV). Maier was dedicated

to spreading of Truth—Truth that was unchanging, Truth that was reliable, Truth that was sufficient and sustaining, Truth that was salvific for time and eternity.

His mission of truth, however, faced a problem as he went on the air in 1930. Enduring truth was falling out of fashion. Maier lamented, “There is a haze of doubt and uncertainty that rises from the unbelief so rampant in our day; there is the smoke-screen of modernist delusion by which the verities of our faith disappear in the black barrage of human speculation.”<sup>42</sup> “Our modern, grasping, skeptical age,” he observed, had come to rely solely on “human reason”—the “cold, calculating” and highly flawed reason it had unwisely “enthroned.” The outrageous outcome of this reliance was that reason so ensconced “tells us that the only religious verities are those which can be tested and proved by the results of modern scientific investigation.”<sup>43</sup> While Maier indicted the many secular contributors to the lubricious state of “Truth,” he particularly regretted that at a time when the church should have been reemphasizing the immutable nature of its truth-claims, its Modernist wing only added to the confusion. He complained that the “devices of the weather-vane pulpit are as froth that is blown away with every change of the wind: and these chameleon-like preachers, who can change their color to match every shade of popular flavor, only lead men more deeply into sloughs of despair.”<sup>44</sup>

With eloquent confidence, he unrelentingly confirmed the reliability of scriptural authority, reaffirmed the necessity for (and sufficiency of) Jesus Christ’s atoning blood, promised the universal availability of God’s grace, urgently called for sanctified personal lives and prophetically urged national repentance, established common ground across traditional Christian groups, urged patriotism while holding patriots to their ideals, and promised that God’s providential hand was guiding the affairs of the world, notwithstanding the messiness of the times. While articulating these overarching themes, he demonstrated a broad knowledge of developments in economics, politics, academia, medicine, science, literature, popular entertainment, and society as a whole, which further enhanced the relevance of Maier’s messages.

While Maier was accused occasionally of speaking above listeners’ heads, he was, in fact, most popular amongst common men and women. In fact, even though Maier was a well-educated man and an academic by profession, he went out of his way to craft messages that were accessible and moving. Though a biblical scholar who prepared his expository preaching by reading Scripture in its original Hebrew and Greek, Maier virtually never referred to the original texts in his broadcasts. On the few occasions when he did indeed speak with overly-lofty vocabulary, the effect likely only increased the authority communicated to his audience.

In addition to the doctrinally foundational content of his sermons, several ancillary topics came up frequently. Maier considered godly families to be the building blocks of society, and he reinforced this conviction frequently. He urged fathers to provide stable family leadership and mothers to care for their homes and

nurture their children. He counselled repentance and reconciliation in cases of infidelity or harmful behavior. As for children, Maier urged them to respect their parents and to shun the common urge to “sow” their “wild oats.” He urged husbands and wives to take the biblical instruction to “be fruitful and multiply” to heart. Maier railed against birth control in more vocal ways than most of his Protestant clerical peers. Birth control, in his opinion, represented a shirking of societal duties, a rejection of familial fulfillment, and a thwarting of God’s will.<sup>45</sup> Abortion also came under fire, for these reasons in addition to its taking of an unborn life.

Maier also connected with his audience as he spoke of societal ills plaguing American life. He acknowledged the prevalence of alcohol abuse and urged those afflicted to turn their addictions over to God. He cautioned against the allure of gambling and extramarital sex. Maier warned of the perils of a life of crime, quoting current crime statistics while invoking the authoritative name of J. Edgar Hoover on numerous occasions. Maier also spoke of the damning sin of suicide with some regularity. His preaching revealed a keen awareness of the shortcomings of both the country and the church in matters of race. For his time, he was remarkably critical of the treatment of minorities, especially blacks, in America. Maier urged the church to recognize the equality of all men and women before God and pleaded for social reform in society, while maintaining his practice of eschewing prescription of specific public policies.

Maier was an educator who was often critical of the academy. While he made it clear that he supported academic inquiry, scientific discovery, and liberal education, he inveighed against those who used these endeavors to undermine belief in Almighty God and in Christian orthodoxy. Maier took humanistic optimists, liberal theologians and philosophers, and atheistic scientists to task, while calling attention to members of the academic community who retained their faith commitments. He was particularly vocal about the threat of Darwinian evolution to Christian teaching, voicing concern about the dismissal of the Creator, and consternation about evolutionary ideas harming morality over time.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, although he had plenty to say about society and the church, Maier gave partisan politics a wide berth. By doing so, he avoided potentially alienating radio listeners and prevented distracting “noise” from interfering with his biblical messages. What his sermons lacked in partisanship they made up for with the sturdy truth-claims of Christianity. At a time when liberal Protestants like Harry Emerson Fosdick argued, “What one says on the air must be universal, catholic, inclusive, profoundly human,” Maier talked about universal love and inclusive hope but claimed that such were made possible by the exclusive work of Christ.<sup>47</sup> He was indeed catholic, but with an urgent message that he presented as profoundly divine.

\* \* \*

In addition to being an evangelist, Maier was a pastor—a pastor of the airwaves, who was invited into the homes of his “parishioners” by the turn of a radio dial. A confluence of the stressful times in which they lived, new and enhanced technology, the emergence of mass culture via network radio, the unique melding of perceived intimacy with, and authority of, radio personalities, in combination with Maier’s gripping delivery of his messages, enabled this Lutheran cleric to unlock greater potency of the centuries-old, pastoral “Office of the Keys,” across the nation and beyond.

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As would be expected, the LLL, under whose sponsorship *TLH* operated, paid particular attention to audience penetration. Minutes of the LLL’s Lutheran Hour Operating Committee noted that during the peak of radio’s popularity in the late 1940s, an average of seventy radio sets out of one hundred would be turned on at some point during a typical Sunday in the United States. They reported that of those seventy sets, “four, sooner or later, tuned into ‘The Lutheran Hour.’”<sup>48</sup> In other words, according to LLL research, with biases of its own, nearly 6 percent of Sunday radio listeners in America heard *TLH*.<sup>49</sup> In 1947, the *Christian Herald* presented Maier’s audience as twenty million each Sunday, which it claimed made Maier “the ‘preaching-est preacher’ in all the world today, and doubtless of all time.” His “impassioned sermons” reached six hundred million in a radio season.<sup>50</sup> In a lengthy feature article on Maier in June of 1948, the *Saturday Evening Post* declared that “Doctor Maier . . . hold[s] something big. . . . [H]is radio gospel encircles the globe” as it is “heard by 20 million persons . . . fifty-two times a year.”<sup>51</sup>

In early 1945, *Pageant* noted that the broadcast employed “from 30 to 55 clerks and stenographers . . . to assort and answer his mail, which at times becomes an engulfing torrent of 25 thousand letters a week.”<sup>52</sup> The tally for this radio season ending a few months later was 340,000.<sup>53</sup> In March 1947, the *Christian Herald* explained that “four million people have written letters to Dr. Maier” since he went on the air and that “it takes 70 women to handle the mail,” which arrived at a pace of “as many as 8,000 [letters] in a single day.”<sup>54</sup> The following year, a *Saturday Evening Post* profile noted that Maier’s clerical staff handling correspondence had reached one hundred persons—a number repeated a few months later in the periodical *Radio and Television Life*.<sup>55</sup> In his 1948 critical examination of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), Ernest Gordon pointed out that even though the FCC reaped the benefits of “close to a monopoly of free time” from major networks, Maier and *TLH* “receive[d] 30,000 letters a week—three times the mail of all FCC

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programs together.”<sup>56</sup> By the time Maier died in January 1950, his annual incoming mail had risen to over 500,000 letters.<sup>57</sup>

Even more than the sheer volume of mail, the content of listener correspondence demonstrated the genuine pastoral role Maier filled for thousands of members of his radio flock. From the beginning of *TLH* broadcasts, mail both confirmed Maier’s pastoral role and sought his pastoral counsel. Many writers sent letters of affirmation and support (including financial support), and others wrote simply requesting a copy of specific sermons. Many shared redemptive, personal narratives that were an outgrowth of Maier’s sermons, including suicides halted at the last minute and extramarital rendezvous stopped short.<sup>58</sup> Thousands more confessed temptation and wrongdoing, sought advice and prayer, and asked questions relating to Scripture, doctrine, and the church. Maier’s son recalls that “probably no category of effort commanded more of Father’s time than answering problem mail. Even with staff counseling assistance, he . . . [dictated] late into . . . evenings.”<sup>59</sup>

As previously mentioned, *TLH* continually invited listeners to write letters to the program, often offering inexpensive, inspirational gifts such as cross lapel pins or small pictures, in addition to copies of the week’s sermon. But Maier went further in his pastoral efforts, while also respecting the role of local parish ministers. The closing announcements of the weekly broadcasts extended an invitation: “If you have no church affiliation and are troubled by a spiritual problem, Dr. Maier will be glad to advise you.”<sup>60</sup> The announcer assured the listeners that their letters seeking counsel “will be regarded as a personal, sacred trust.”<sup>61</sup>

Through the end of his ministry, Maier insisted on personally answering one hundred to two hundred letters per week.<sup>62</sup> Certain letters describing particularly urgent personal problems or needs were passed on to Lutheran pastors in the geographic area of the letter writer for more personal assistance. On occasion, Maier even went so far as to prepare a sermon for a single letter writer and then telephoned that person to urge him or her to listen to his upcoming broadcast. Maier’s clerical staff handled the remaining bulk of his mail. While responses to correspondents varied in their level of personalization, over the years Maier developed standardized tracts or texts to respond to four hundred different problems, questions, and situations, thereby enabling him and his staff to respond situationally and quickly.<sup>63</sup>

A review of these prepared responses demonstrates just how seriously Maier and his staff took their pastoral responsibilities to letter-writing listeners. An internal *TLH* correspondence guide emphasized that the “problem-solution paragraphs” on file were “to be used only for Lutheran Hour Correspondence Work” and were “a privileged possession entrusted only to such who carry the delicate responsibility of answering problem mail.” The guide further instructed: “these paragraphs are not to be recopied for general distribution,” nor were they to “be made available to ‘some good friend.’” Topics were alphabetically catalogued and covered an amazing range,

including Anger, the Apocrypha, Baptism of the Insane, Bobbed Hair, Catholics attending Lutheran churches, Drunkards, Gambling, Insurance Policies, Judas, Interracial Marriage, Masturbation, Millerites, Predestination, Soul-sleep, Suicide, Water (Holy), and Worry (Needless). Responses were remarkably gracious in tone, easy to understand, and often supported arguments or advice with scriptural references. It was not uncommon for *TLH* responses to encourage personal contact with a local pastor.<sup>64</sup>

As his ministry flourished, Maier, and his loyal listeners adopted correspondence as a means to personalize mass-mediated pastoral relationships. The radio pastor offered access to the unique combination of intimacy and authority, with anonymity. Said another way, the very public proclamation of religion enabled a very personalized and private reception of religion for those who desired it. To be sure, other radio preachers generated and responded to significant correspondence of their own.<sup>65</sup> But the letter-writing of Maier’s listeners, and the manner in which this minister responded, broadened his “pastorate” in the most dramatic and often life-changing ways.

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## Summary

In the 1920s, the harnessing of radio technology to create the broadcast medium changed American life in dramatic ways. As these developments rapidly occurred, a few visionary religious leaders saw the potential of reaching millions of souls with the Gospel of Christ. One such leader was Walter A. Maier, whose effectiveness in this endeavor was unsurpassed. His erudition, evangelical fervor, unwavering theological orthodoxy, boundless energy, eloquent delivery, and pastoral heart all came together to build and serve the “one, holy catholic and apostolic Church” in the United States and around the globe. And he did this as a seminary professor in a Lutheran denomination not associated with innovative methods of proclamation or outreach.

Maier was not drawn to radio by an innate interest in technology or novel devices, but he embraced these tools because of a burning desire to “bring Christ to the nations.” The confluence of broadcast technology, the resulting emergence of mass culture, and an anxiety-laden historical period—the Great Depression, World War II, and the early Cold War—produced an unprecedented opportunity to reach citizens and sinners with a message of hope. In an age of modernist skepticism (both

within secular and churchly quarters), naive humanist theories, hostility to traditional orthodoxy, and downright unbelief, Maier preached “Truth”—with a capital “T.” For millions each week, the Lutheran cleric’s divinely-inspired exhortations on truth, projected by “radio towers of strength” across the land, offered salvific peace, sanctifying encouragement, and indispensable pastoral care in troubled times.

Maier’s utilization of a previously unavailable medium to reach millions with a crystalline presentation of Law and Gospel took Luther’s marriage of scriptural exposition and technology to a new level. Maier’s embrace of radio airwaves to contextualize biblical truths, speak prophetically to individuals and the nation (while eschewing political commentary), and complement the role of pastors and their parishes, all in the midst of turmoil, can provide a helpful model of evangelistic/pastoral innovation and homiletic adaptation to today’s church leaders. Maier’s commitment “to use every available and suitable station on earth for the proclamation of Christ’s eternal Gospel” only

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requires a re-conception of “station” to apply to the multi-media environment of the twenty-first century.<sup>66</sup> In a world even more hostile to the concept of enduring truth than in Maier’s time, in a religious environment in which church leaders increasingly downplay or dilute the exclusive truth-claims of Christian orthodoxy, and in a culture that features unbelievers and “Nones” in greater numbers than ever, perhaps the Reverend Doctor Maier’s sense of urgency, creativity, and tenacity offers profitable instruction in the divinely-appointed enterprise of “twisting the devil’s tail.”

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Buckoll’s entire translation of this hymn appears in *Hymns and Prayers for Use in the Chapel of Marlborough College* (Oxford: Horace Hart, Printer to the University [privately printed], 1907), 302.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959), 427.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Rudel, *Hello, Everybody!: The Dawn of American Radio* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2008), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Lenthall, *Radio’s America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Hope and Ashes: The Birth of Modern Times* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 41.

<sup>6</sup> See Gleason L. Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1938), 211, 213; Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 21, 22; Mark Ward, Sr., *Air of Salvation: The Story of Christian Broadcasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 23–25; the excerpt from correspondence can be found in Spencer Miller, Jr., “Radio and Religion,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 177, Radio: The Fifth Estate (January 1935): 135, 136.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Bob Lochte, *Christian Radio: The Growth of a Mainstream Broadcasting Force* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Lochte, *Christian Radio*, 21–25; Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel*, 209; Dennis N. Voskuil, “The Power of the Air: Evangelicals and the Rise of Religious Broadcasting,” in *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media*, ed. Quentin J. Schultze (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1990), 71–74.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis N. Voskuil, “Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media,” in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82; Lowell Saunders, “The National Religious Broadcasters and the Availability of Commercial Radio Time” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1968), 211, 212; William F. Fore, “A Short History of Religious Broadcasting,” unpublished manuscript dated August 10, 1967, Eugene Bertermann Collection, box 8, folder 12, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College. (William Fore was the Executive Director of the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches.)

Note: Beginning in 1927, NBC operated two radio networks—NBC-Red and NBC-Blue. In 1943, it was forced to divest of NBC-Blue in response to federal anti-trust action.

<sup>10</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 69–71; Mark Ward, Sr., *Air of Salvation*, 43, 44. While Walter Maier gathered enough technical knowledge to understand the operational requirements of radio broadcasting, his son points out that Maier was not naturally drawn to new technology or gadgets. He allowed seminary students to set up their ham radio sets in his home; however, his interest was primarily in radio as a communication medium, rather than as a technological achievement. The evangelistically progressive Old Testament professor was content to appreciate what he termed “the miracle of radio,” without delving into its scientific intricacies. (Paul L. Maier interview with author, May 16, 2013.)

<sup>11</sup> Walter A. Maier, “Why Not a Lutheran Radio Station?,” *Walther League Messenger* 31 (March 1923), 314, 315.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Graebner, “KFUO’s Beginnings,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (October 1964): 82, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 71, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Graebner, “KFUO’s Beginnings,” 82, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Maier, with the help of Kretzschmar, John H. C. Fritz, Concordia Dean of Students, and a few others, raised significant foundational funding via appeals to Maier’s loyal Walther Leaguers and to other Lutheran laymen, including the Lutheran Laymen’s League. Dean Fritz even convinced the seminarians to support the project by hitting up friends and family back home for donations and by dipping into their student organizational fund. (They contributed \$2,500—not bad for financially-strapped clerics-in-training in 1923.) More importantly, this generated enthusiasm and “ownership” amongst Concordia’s student body that would prove beneficial to KFUO and, eventually, *TLH*.—See Herman H. Hohenstein, “The History of KFUO,” *Walther League Messenger* 35, June 1927, 636; Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 72; Fred and Edith Pankow, *75 Years of Blessing and The Best is Yet to Come: The History of the*

*International Lutheran Laymen's League* (St. Louis: International Lutheran Laymen's League, 1992), 30.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Graebner, "KFUO's Beginnings," 84, 85; Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Graebner, "KFUO Beginnings," 85, 86.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Graebner, "KFUO Beginnings," 86. While *The Christian Century* may have found the creation of a "called" clerical position as a radio station manager innovative, it did not change its general opinion of the LCMS or its leading seminary. In July of the following year, the magazine referred to Concordia Seminary-St. Louis as a "kind of corporate pope" that exercised "rigid discipline" on the denomination by enforcing "conformity to a theology which may be described as an ossified seventeenth century orthodoxy." The LCMS, the editorial asserted, "has isolated itself from other churches with an effectiveness . . . not surpassed by any other body," thereby rendering its "social influence upon American life . . . very slight."—See "What is Disturbing the Lutherans?" *The Christian Century*, VLIII (July 22, 1926), 909.

<sup>19</sup> See "Suggestions for Speakers Over KFUO," WAM Collection, Box 1, Folder 93, CHI.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Graebner, "KFUO's Beginnings," 93, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Theo Laetsch, "A Trip to the Gospel Voice," *Walther League Messenger* 35 (June 1927), 638.

<sup>22</sup> Fosdick's "take no prisoners" approach to the religious broadcasting battleground was evident in a speech he made at a 1938 banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria, celebrating fifteen years of national religious broadcasting under the auspices of the Federal Council of Churches. In the presence of Radio Corporation of America's President, David Sarnoff, and NBC President, Lenox Lohr, and likeminded NBC radio preachers, Fosdick proclaimed, "Whatever may be the future uncertainties, it is sure that we have an opportunity in religion-on-the-air to make an incalculable contribution that will outflank, overpass, undercut sectarianism in religion." He went on to equate "sectarianism in religion" to a ten-year-old boy who "got onto the fact that there was to be an eclipse of the sun and who sold tickets for ten cents to all the boys of the neighborhood so that they could come into his back yard and see the eclipse. . . . Religion is a cosmic matter, and yet we call people into our back yards so they can see it." Fosdick declared that "you can't talk that way over the air . . . it will not do on the air. What one says on the air must be universal, catholic, inclusive, profoundly human." Quote taken from a "stenographic report" of the Waldorf-Astoria banquet, published to preserve "the proceedings . . . in a permanent form." See "The Church of the Sky" (New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1938), 31–35. See also Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131; Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 214, 379, 380; Ernest Gordon, *Ecclesiastical Octopus: A Factual Report on the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America* (Boston: Fellowship Press, 1948), 87–89.

<sup>23</sup> James DeForest Murch, *Co-operation without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 73, 74; see also Lowell S. Saunders, "The National Religious Broadcasters and the Availability of Commercial Radio Time" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1968), especially Chapter 8.

<sup>24</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Hal Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921–1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1992), 36.

<sup>26</sup> Hal Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television*, 61, 62; Mark Ward, Sr., *Air of Salvation*, 42.

- <sup>27</sup> Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial*, 21–24; Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 110–115; Mark Ward, Sr., *Air of Salvation*, 41–49.
- <sup>28</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 111.
- <sup>29</sup> Concordia Seminary incurred total costs, including faculty and staff salaries, of \$79,448 for the year 1930. Thus, the average weekly expense for that calendar year totaled \$1,528. See *Statistical Yearbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States for the Year 1930* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931), 178.
- <sup>30</sup> “The Greater Possibilities of Radio,” *Lutheran Laymen’s League Bulletin* 1 (November 15, 1929), 28, 29. Note: “Chain systems of broadcasting” is a reference to radio networks.
- <sup>31</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 114.
- <sup>32</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 115.
- <sup>33</sup> Mark Ward, Sr., *Air of Salvation*, 48, 49.
- <sup>34</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 119, 120. For examples of press coverage, see “Lutheran Radio Program,” *The Daily Herald* (Biloxi), October 2, 1930, 6; “On The Air Tonight,” *Appleton Post-Gazette*, November 28, 1930, 10; “Lutherans Inaugurate Radio Hour,” *Oak Parker* (Oak Park, IL), October 3, 1930, 29; “Aces of the Air,” *Hammond Lake County Times*, October 23, 1930, 8; “Christmas Greetings,” *Washington Post*, December 25, 1930, 8. Several newspapers noted that *TLH* was the first effort by a denomination to spread its message via paid network programming.
- <sup>35</sup> For examples, see “Outstanding Events on the Air Today,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1930, 22; “Outstanding Events on the Air Today,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1930, 31.
- <sup>36</sup> For examples, see “Bright Spots for Today,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 13, 1930, 15; “Bright Spots for Today,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 11, 1930, 24; “Bright Spots for Today,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 18, 1930, 22.
- <sup>37</sup> Walter A. Maier, Forward to *The Lutheran Hour*, vi.
- <sup>38</sup> Knudsen would later become president of General Motors.
- <sup>39</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 164–168; Fred and Edith Pankow, *The Best is Yet to Come*, 51–53.
- <sup>40</sup> Walter A. Maier, *Christ for Every Crisis: The Radio Messages Broadcast in the Second Lutheran Hour* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Gerald Perschbacher, Archivist of *TLH*, interview by author, March 10, 2009. Perschbacher explained that two complete *TLH* broadcasts would be recorded on two transcription disks in a single production run. The two-disk sets would be sent to non-network stations, which their “disc jockeys” would play on the air during the time slot they assigned to *TLH*.
- <sup>42</sup> Walter A. Maier, *The Lutheran Hour*, 163.
- <sup>43</sup> Walter A. Maier, *The Lutheran Hour*, 28.
- <sup>44</sup> Walter A. Maier, *Christ for Every Crisis: The Radio Messages Broadcast in the Second Lutheran Hour* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), 66, 67.
- <sup>45</sup> Maier was unrelenting in his attacks on birth control throughout his career. In addition to preaching against it in sermons, he often addressed it in *The Walther League Messenger*, of which he was editor from 1920 to 1945.
- <sup>46</sup> For example: “Humanity is not an accident, a chemical coincidence, but it is God’s supreme masterpiece, created after a counsel of the divine Trinity. . . . If there is nothing divine in man, if he is only a refined form of the beast, then all the ideals of clean, constructive living are shattered.” Walter A. Maier, *The Lutheran Hour*, 67, 68; “I am sure that . . . mental protests will assert that man’s rise from the beast is an accepted fact, removed from all possibility of question, a truism of modern science. ‘All scholarship is on our side,’ the exponents of man’s animal ancestry cry. ‘Only half-wits, mental weaklings, and religious fanatics accept the Book

of Genesis,' they conclude. And so successfully have they plastered this godless theory with scientific endorsement that most of us have forgotten how great a company of internationally acclaimed scientists [Maier provided specific examples of such scientists]. . . have vehemently rejected the brute beginning. . . .The acknowledgment of God as the Fountain of our life must be firmly expressed. . . ." Walter A. Maier, *The Cross from Coast to Coast*, 82–84; "The men who seek to run the world without God or against Him are making a ghastly mess of it. This exile of the Almighty controls much of modern thought. It starts with eliminating God as the Creator, a gloating over the claim that man is a creature of chance on an accidental planet that has no place for God. . . . We are against this claim of man's ape ancestry and this banishing of God, not only because it is against the sacred Scriptures, but also because it contradicts human reason." Walter A. Maier, *The Radio for Christ*, 211, 212, 215; "The worst evil besetting our age is this, that self-willed men stubbornly refuse to heed Holy Writ. Rejecting the divine revelation, they insist: 'No God made man. The human race is descended from brute beasts'. . . Finally it must be clear to every one of us that dethroning God as Creator and making men accidental beasts, atheists are promoting sin, vice, immorality, and the giving free reign to lust. If there is no almighty Ruler . . . no Judge of eternity . . . why worry about truth, honesty, purity, love, faithfulness?" Walter A. Maier, *Global Broadcasts of His Grace*, 95–97.<sup>47</sup> Fosdick as quoted in Quentin J. Schultze, "Evangelical Radio and the Rise of the Electronic Church, 1921-1948," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 298.

<sup>48</sup> Fred and Edith Pankow, *75 Years of Blessing and The Best is Yet to Come*, 88.

<sup>49</sup> Though *TLH* had begun a Thursday evening program in 1930, its broadcasts moved to Sundays in 1935.

<sup>50</sup> William F. McDermott, "Twenty Million Hear Him Preach," *Christian Herald* 70 (March 1947), 43.

<sup>51</sup> Hartzell Spence, "The Man of the Lutheran Hour," *The Saturday Evening Post* 220 (June 19, 1948), 17, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Gross, "The World's Largest Congregation," 119, 120.

<sup>53</sup> Tona Hagen, "The Man of the Hour," 120.

<sup>54</sup> William F. McDermott, "Twenty Million Hear Him Preach," 46.

<sup>55</sup> Hartzell Spence, "The Man of the Lutheran Hour," 89; Judy Maguire, "The Lutheran Hour," *Radio and Television Life* 18 (October 31, 1948), 34.

<sup>56</sup> Ernest Gordon, *Ecclesiastical Octopus: A Factual Report of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (Boston: Fellowship Press, 1948), 89, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Tona Hagen, "The Man of the Hour," 120.

<sup>58</sup> Hartzell Spence, "The Man of the Lutheran Hour," 88.

<sup>59</sup> Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 172. By "problem mail," Maier was referring to mail from writers experiencing some personal struggle or problem.

<sup>60</sup> See "Continuities" from broadcasts of *The Lutheran Hour*, Lutheran Hour Archives, St. Louis. The announcer often added the words, "as he has thousands of others," or "at no charge," or "freely and confidentially," at the end of this invitation.

<sup>61</sup> For an example of the "personal, sacred trust" reference, see the "Continuity" for November 9, 1941, in "Continuities" from broadcasts of *The Lutheran Hour*, Lutheran Hour Archives, St. Louis.

<sup>62</sup> Judy Maguire, "The Lutheran Hour," 34.

<sup>63</sup> Hartzell Spence, "The Man of the Lutheran Hour," 89; Tona Hagen, "Man of the Hour," 128.

<sup>64</sup> M. L. Heerboth, ed., “Answer Guide for Correspondence” found in “International Lutheran Laymen’s League” Collection, Box: “Lutheran Hour. Correspondence. Guide for Answers to Lutheran Hour Correspondence,” CHI, St. Louis, n.d.

<sup>65</sup> Examples: In the 1920s, radio preaching pioneer Paul Rader received thousands of letters a month, requiring dedicated secretarial support. See James L. Snyder, *Paul Rader: Portrait of an Evangelist (1879–1938)* (Ocala, FL: Fellowship Ministries, 2003), 151. In his memoirs, prominent Protestant minister and radio sermonizer Harry Emerson Fosdick mentioned letters “from all sorts of places and from all imaginable human situations,” generated by his *National Vespers* program on NBC. See Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 223–225. Letters were a regular part of Charles E. Fuller’s *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour* program. Each week, Fuller’s wife read a sampling of their abundant radio-response correspondence, especially those letters that bore “witness to what the Lord has done.” In the mid-1950s, Grace Payton Fuller published a book of excerpts of letters received that she considered “the most interesting and edifying” of “testimonies.” See Mrs. Charles E. Fuller, *Heavenly Sunshine: Letters to the “Old-Fashioned Revival Hour”* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1956).

<sup>66</sup> Paul Maier, Walter Maier’s son, recalls that his father was relentless in “always” restating this goal verbatim, in numerous settings, up to the time of his death. Paul L. Maier, interview with author, 23 April 2009. See also Paul L. Maier, *A Man Spoke*, 191, 271.