

Why the abrupt Death of Walter A. Maier?

“Behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord....

“Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel....

“And their father said to them, ‘Which way did he go’?

“And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, ‘Are you the man of God who came from Judah?’ and he said, ‘I am’.

“Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eat bread’.

“And he said, ‘I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place.

“For I have been told by the word of the Lord, ‘You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came’”.

“He said to him, ‘I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, ‘Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water’”. But he lied to him.

“So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water.

“Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back;

“And he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you,

“”But you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the Lord said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water’, your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers”’.

“So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back.

“So when he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him....

“So when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, ‘It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him’.” 1st Kings 13:1, 11, 12, 14-24, & 26.

In my book on the Charismatic Movement, I mentioned that the golden age of Christianity in the United States ended and began to fall in the year of 1950. One of the events of that year that signaled this fall was the abrupt death of Walter A. Maier at the age of 56.

Why was this event picked as an historical marker? It was picked because Maier had a huge influence on this country. There was a huge audience which tuned into his radio gospel sermon every Sunday. After the Lord took his life, his missionary preaching stopped, and his influence went away. The huge radio audience also diminished. The men who took over Maier’s spot behind the microphone never could match the high popularity which Maier’s frankly-speaking, anecdote-filled, law and gospel sermons enjoyed. With that termination, all of the other salting elements in the church (Matthew 5:13) that were preserving the golden age - the preaching and the teaching - either eventually would come to an end also, were weakened by

self-inflicted causes, such as worldliness, were increasingly ignored by flesh-following church members who, as Scripture diagnoses it, turned “their ears away from the truth” (2nd Timothy 4:4), or who self-injected themselves with the cancer of false doctrine (2nd Timothy 2:17).

Since Maier was only in his fifties in late 1949, it was naturally presumed that he could and would preach for many years to come, and that his radio show would continue on with the phenomenal growth with which God had blessed it all along. However, abruptly in January of 1950, God brought an end to this national and worldwide gospel broadcasting.

Indeed, Maier’s radio show had given the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod tremendous publicity, and, as a consequence, enormous prestige. Hence, Maier’s influence was felt by that synod. Consequently, after he died, correspondingly the shock was great.

Thus it would have been quite natural at his death for the leaders and for the laypeople of that synod to have asked: “Why would God take a God-blessed, missionary activity which was proven to reach tens of millions across the globe, and shut it down, for all practical purposes, by the death of its speaker? Why would God give up on his own gospel-cause by doing this?” Humanly speaking, what God had done made no sense to them. To them he seemed to be at cross-purposes. Moreover, what God had done had no small effect on them.

What was the reason for this abrupt death, then?

Earlier on in his radio sermons, which were later published in books, Maier had pointed out that modernism had taken over a number of denominations in the U.S. after the First World War. He regularly attacked modernism, and in a sermon from 1943 stated that his synod’s seminary in Saint Louis “had never had a Modernist on its faculty” (Walter A. Maier, *Victory through Christ* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1945], page 354).

Just the same, in September of 1945 a *Statement* signed by 44 clergy and professors of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) was sent to all of the clergy of the LCMS. It soon became common knowledge in other church bodies as well. By this creed the 44 signers showed themselves to be liberals, indeed, to have the spirit of modernism, since by their “conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology” they placed in jeopardy the authority, inerrancy, and inviolability of the Bible in the presentation of its doctrine. Two of the signers were professors at the Saint Louis seminary: William Arndt (1880-1957) and Paul Bretscher (1893-1974). Of all of the faculty and clergy available that could be asked, Maier had selected these two men to read over his sermons before they were either broadcast (Bretscher) or published in book form (Arndt). See Walter A. Maier, *Global Broadcasts of His Grace* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1949), page lxxxi. Thus, while Maier publicly criticized the anti-biblical positions of others on his world-wide radio show, for almost four and one-half years, from the time of the release of the *Statement* until his death, Maier not only remained silent on this doctrinal defection, but also on other unbiblical statements made, as well, for instance, in his synod’s publication, *The Lutheran Witness*.

God had waited almost four and one-half years for Maier to speak out and not to be a hypocrite, either out of weakness or by intent. In addition to this, there was the matter of the probable loss of confidence in him by the radio audience once this situation would become known. In fact, this was a much more serious concern, for the Lord’s precious gospel cause would be harmed by, of all people, Maier himself for his continuous lack of good faith in this matter.

Not to be overlooked was the further concern that in the summer of 1950 the LCMS in convention was set to adopt the *Common Confession* as part of its creed.

Indeed, keep in mind that, as a body, the LCMS never did humble itself over the doctrinal defection of the 44 signers, nor did its president ever discipline the 44 as it was his duty to do. So while the LCMS with great elation had just celebrated its centennial in 1947; while in the 1940's the LCMS' bureaucracy, with beaming anticipation, had charts drawn up which projected on the basis of its amazing growth in the past, the same growth for the future; while the radio program of Maier had given the LCMS enormous prestige, the LCMS, as a whole, never did display an intent to humble itself over its increasing doctrinal defection, nor to do anything effective to derail it, but in convention in 1950 would actually embrace it as part of its creed.

Why the abrupt death, then?

Draw your conclusion!