

THEODORE N. MARIER (1912-2001)

On 17 October 1912, Theodore Marier was born in Fall River, MA, as one of the five children of very musical parents, George A. and Lena L. Marier.

During the winter of 1917/18 the gifted lad began piano studies with his maternal aunt “who had an extraordinary musical talent” and greatly influenced the boy. As the father’s work changed, the family relocated to Mansfield after the Great War, and then to Dedham by 1920 where young Ted, age eight, became an altar boy and then assistant organist for the Sunday school. His first lessons on the organ were taught by Ruth MacMahon, who at the time was in charge of the music at St. Mary’s, Dedham. “I suppose it was during those years,” the eager pupil later said, “that my future involvement with church music was beginning to take its direction. I seemed comfortable in the environment of the Church and with the support of my family, what I was doing seemed to be the right thing for me to do.”

Young Marier graduated from Boston College High School in 1930. He took his BA degree in 1934 with a major in philosophy, and then directed the band at his alma mater until 1942, becoming the College Director of Music in 1937. It was during these years that Theodore Marier wrote the music to “Sweep Down the Field for Boston” and “Boston’s Out to Win Again.” Today, his grandchildren fondly recall his tales about the famous pinwheels the BC Marching band performed at the half time show during the football season....

Sheepskin in hand, the young graduate responded to the invitation of Dr. Joseph Ecker, the choirmaster of Saint Paul’s Parish in Cambridge, to audition for the vacant position of organist in June of 1934. “I was pleased that he offered me the job,” Marier later recalled, “and so began my association with the parish which lasted over half a century. That same year also marked the beginning of my close friendship and thirty year association with the Mons. Augustine F. Hickey, pastor of St. Paul’s (1925/65), one of the finest priests I’ve ever known.”

Mons. (since 1937) Hickey, long time Vicar General to William Cardinal O’Conner, was a legendary figure among the priests of the Archdiocese of Boston. A very proper person and short of stature (about 5’2), he confided to friends that “You don’t know what it is to go through life looking up to people.” When autumn arrives, Mons Hickey puts on spats; after Decoration Day he took off the spats and put on a straw hat. Born in Cambridge and ordained in 1906, Hickey (like Cardinal O’Conner) had studied in Rome. There, he was strongly influenced by the pastoral example given by the sainted Pope who set the tone in the *alma Urbs* at that time: Pius X. In later life, Hickey often told of going to hear the Pope preach to the people on Sunday afternoons: as a student in Rome, he listened to the white clad figure explain the Catechism, talking about the Good Shepherd on Good Shepherd Sunday to the youngsters and Roman parishioners he regularly invited to the Vatican to participate in Holy Mass with him. This made a profound impression upon young Hickey, and served as a model for him years later when he did so much to promote the liturgical formation of his people.

Very conscientious in his work as pastor (and earlier as superintendent of Boston Catholic Schools as well as V.G.), Hickey wrote out his sermon every Sunday, stressing “liturgical” elements such as the Scripture readings and the texts of the Mass Proper. “He was famous, too, with Children long before the liturgical movement began to blossom. He used to go to the Children’s Mass every Sunday and walk up and down the aisle and tell the children what part of the Mass they were at and explain all the different sections of the Mass. I’ve heard children who were at these Masses” (remembers Fr. Joseph Collins, Hickey’s successor as [pastor,]) “explain how helpful the instructions of Mons. Hickey were in getting them to appreciate the Mass.”

Such was the atmosphere in which Theodore Marier began his life’s work as a professional musician in the service of the *Ecclesia Orans*. During the second world war, as his own family grew with the birth of twin boys, the young father worked in a war plant

“for the duration,” and soon after V-J Day, sensitive ears detected the rumblings of change in liturgical practice. The era of congregational participation was about to commence, and to no one’s surprise, Mons. Augustine Hickey was one of the first to adopt the idea at St. Paul’s, eventually adapting it to his style of reciting and chanting Holy Mass. “At the same time that extensive changes were being talked about, after Pius XII published the encyclical *Mediator Dei* in 1947, Dr. Ecker decided to retire as St. Paul’s choir director. Mons Hickey asked me to take over,” said Marier, “which I did. It was then that my choral conducting experience and Gregorian chant preparation were put to good use in building a program that would eventually include congregational participation.”

“At first,” he goes on, “it was the ‘dialogue Mass’ introduced by Mons. Hickey and enthusiastically supported by his assistant, Fr. Joseph Collins. I seemed to be attracted to the idea and sought out ways to learn more about papal legislation having to do with liturgy. This interest brought me into contact with leaders of the new movement, especially with members of the National Liturgical Conference including Fathers Shawn Sheehan, William Leonard SJ, Mons. Martin B. Hellriegel, Fr. Gerald Ellard SJ, among others.

The new organists-choirmaster at St. Paul’s Cambridge found such contacts easier because of another memorable event: the 1948 National Liturgical Week which ran for four days at Mechanic’s Hall in Boston. Mons. Hickey was to be local chairman, but was taken ill. Nonetheless, he was “the first to offer the use of St. Paul’s vestments, candles, missals, whatever was necessary for the presentations...while many of the local clergy stayed away in droves from scheduled events. One of the most memorable events at this convention was the presentation of the new Easter Vigil ritual given by Mons. Martin B. Hellriegel of St. Louis. Later, this same rite was the first liturgical service televised in the Archdiocese of Boston, and it took place at St. Paul’s. “Theodore Marier never forgot that same night,” outside on the sidewalk were Fr. Leonard Feeney’s followers--their headquarters, if you remember, were across the street from the Church-- parading back and forth with placards in front of the Church deploring ‘Father Hickey’s Midnight Frolics’ taking place inside the Church!”

Also in 1948, as Marier later recalled, “with Mons. Hickey’s permission and encouragement, a card was printed containing the musical notation for the Creed and the Mass responses. The card was distributed into the pews. From that moment on the people were invited to participate in the singing of the Mass prayers and responses at the High Mass. Some people always seem to resent change, but by repetition and insistence over a period of about ten years, the resistance eventually broke down, and now congregational participation in the Mass has become the order of the day.”

This is all the more noteworthy because in 1937, as organist Marier was working for his Master’s Degree in music at Harvard, Hickey’s attempt to distribute a small parish bulletin was stymied. This monthly bulletin would have been only four pages the size of a holy card, outlining parish activities and important feast days--alerting the faithful to Catholic feasts was always part of Hickey’s liturgical mission--but O’Connell’s Chancery refused the Vicar General permission, telling him sternly to “concentrate all efforts on (the diocesan newspaper) the Pilot which contains all news and sufficient instruction.”

Shortly after coming to St. Paul’s Cambridge in 1934, young Theodore Marier met the Rt. Rev. Pastor’s niece, a Radcliffe student by the name of Edith Alice Hickey, whom he courted assiduously until their marriage in 1939. “As I look back,” the Maestro said in 1993, “I think this was the most important event in my life. She was perfect for me. Only a loving, understanding and sympathetic wife, as she was, could have adjusted to and support the various aspects of my somewhat eclectic career...Throughout the good times and the not so good, she was always present to the children and me, as a mother and as a wife. During the choir school years she came to know the boys of the school and their parents intimately, offering comfort and encouragement, inspiration. She was a real

‘mother’ to the choir until she died of cancer in 1977, on the feast of the Sacred Heart... without the encouragement, inspiration, and domestic tranquillity which she provided year in and year out, I could not have attained the goals for which we both strove. How often she said when the storm clouds seemed to gather on the horizon, ‘Don’t worry, this program will succeed because it is God’s work.’ And so it has, so she was right.”

Having begun his keyboard studies at an early age, Theodore Marier continued them at the New England Conservatory of Music, finishing with Homer Humphrey before taking his FAGO degree from the American Guild of Organists in 1947. During his Harvard years, Marier learned the art of choral conducting from Archibald Davison, the legendary director of the Harvard Glee Club, whose “enthusiasm for good choral sound made me want to be like him and produce as fine a choral group as his,” as he put it.

“I often think about ‘Doc Davison’, as he was known among his students. Stock phrases of his kept coming to mind and his image appears before me whenever in my own teaching I hear myself saying, ‘Have the music in your head, not your head in the music!’ or ‘Do not talk about the music, give your singers the example you want them to follow, for one illustration is worth a thousand words!’ I remember how in choral class he would sit in one of the sections of the chorus, for example among the altos of the tenors, and then proceed to sing the wrong notes. His purpose was to observe whether the student conductor heard the wrong notes and then listen to what the student planned to do about it. Such lessons one never forgets.”

Marier’s principle teacher of composition was Walter Piston, whose lessons he later credited with “spark[ing] whatever creativity I may have had in the way of music composition. His classes in form and in analysis, fugue, and private lessons in free composition opened areas of music which might otherwise have remained a closed book to me.” Piston invited Marier and several of the graduate students of composition to participate in a special seminar for ten hours of personalized critique and instruction from Igor Stravinsky, a visiting professor at the time. Marier later expressed his appreciation for Stravinsky’s mastery of the craft of orchestration.

By his own admission, one of the most important musical influences upon Theodore Marier was his first contract with Gregorian Chant, for the lasting interest thus enkindled, eventually aided him in establishing a solid foundation for the exemplary music program at St. Paul’s.

“In the mid thirties” (Marier liked to recall) “the Pius Tenth School of Liturgical Music in New York conducted courses in Gregorian Chant at the Sacred Heart Academy in Newton MA. The faculty for the courses was headed by Mother Georgia Stevens, a Madam of the Sacred Heart, and a group of her students from the New York school. The courses included a study of Gregorian chant notation in the sung liturgy of the Church. We listened to recordings of the chant made by the choir of the Abbey of St. Pierre de Solesmes in France, under the direction of Dom Joseph Gajard OSB. The courses proved to be a mind stretching experience for me, and one that has lasted through out my life. The recordings especially impressed me by the beauty of the tone, the flow of the rhythm, and the nuances of diction. I was hooked. I bought the choir directors first album, produced by Victor in the early 78 rpm format. (I still own the album--a treasure!) Little did I know at that time that the director of this fabulous choir and I were to become close friends twenty five years later...It seemed to me that there was nothing to do but to start my own Gregorian Chant schola. This I did just before the outbreak of W.W.II. This small schola of friends and chant enthusiasts became the Gregorian schola at St. Paul’s after I took over as choirmaster in 1947. It was this schola that attracted a few Harvard students, among whom was a lad named Bernard Law. Another was Fr. Gabriel, a Trappist monk of St. Joseph’s Abby in Spencer MA who as Jack Berthonnier had sung in my group. It was through him that I was privileged to meet Dom Gajard who came to Spencer to work with the monks

in the area of Gregorian Chant. After that meeting we became close friends and remained so until Dom Gajard's death at Solesmes in 1972. My close relationship with the other monks of Solesmes has remained so until today."

When in 1963 Fr. Gerald Ellard SJ passed away, a group of his friends decided to produce a book or *Festschrift* in honor of a man who had been so prominent in the vanguard of reformers. Contributors to this book of essays were those involved in the burgeoning liturgical movement. Marier recalled that "Fr. Leonard asked me to write a piece for a collection. At first I was unsure what to write until he said, 'you are always talking about integrating a choir program into the curriculum of a parish school; why not write about that?' And so I tried to make more specific what had been up to that time only a vague proposal. It was here that the idea of the choir school was born."

Thus in 1963 the St. Paul's Choir School began with 25 students chosen from throughout the Archdiocese of Boston. Under Marier's direction, the young choristers sang in the parish choir with members of the Harvard Catholic Club. Harvard students also assisted with the recreation of a program. The school was designed as a four year course for students of academic ability and musical talent, assigning two periods of each school day to music in addition to an hour after school. The music program was based upon ear training and sight singing according to the Ward Method, and also included music appreciation, basic music theory and history, and the opportunity for instrumental studies. From the beginning, it was Marier's creative genius, vision, tenacity and hard work ("bushwhacking" as he called it) which eventually brought the choir an international reputation in the liturgical music community as well as in its local area. Though Theodore Marier retired from St. Paul's in 1984, the work he began, continues to this day. As the *Boston Pilot* noted after his passing, "Although many parishes in the Archdiocese have fine music programs, it would not be at all unfair to describe St. Paul Parish, just off Harvard Square, as a musical Mecca. The 11 o'clock Sunday morning Mass, with the combined Boys' and Mens' Choirs draws worshipers from everywhere. The music is stunning. When the congregation sings, it does so with a full throat. When the crystal pure voice of the boys fill the sanctuary, there is something almost celestial added to the worship. St. Paul's has musical capabilities that other parishes would love to emulate—even if only partially. And all of this is the incomparable legacy of Theodore Marier, a genius of Church music with an international reputation..."

In 1945 J. Arthur Reilly, prominent Boston politician (Police and Fire Commission) and publisher of Catholic church music, engaged Theodore Marier as chief music editor for McLaughlin & Reilly Co. The association perdured until 1962, and during this fruitful period, as Marier remembered it, "I edited many publications for the Church and became acquainted with many of the composers of church music at that time, along with the details of the publishing process."

In this capacity Theodore Marier did a great deal to further the cause of *musica viva* in Catholic choir lofts, commissioning or bringing to publication works of contemporary composers like his good friend Jean Langlais (e.g. Mass in Ancient Style Op. 75 in 1952), Marcel Dupre (Eight Short Preludes on Gregorian Themes Op. 45 in 1958) or Flor Peeters (e.g. Thirty-Five Miniatures Op. 55, Little Organ Book, *Jozefs-messe* Op. 21 etc.).

Arthur Reilly summed up his recollections by saying "Organist - choirmaster - teacher. These are the terms that have been commonly associated with the name of Theodore Marier during his long career. But none of these terms, even though they are accurate and appropriate, reveals the intense spiritual drive of this renowned Catholic church musician. Nor do they all reveal the unusual service he has rendered, time and time again, to assist in the improvement of church music performances in all parts of the country. Nor do they reveal the fullness of his dynamic personality as displayed uniformly and consistently all these years. Nor can one find adequate description of the depth of his integrity or his consistent, unyielding, unbending dedication to the highest

standards of performance, in these terms. All in all, he has been truly an elevating influence upon all with whom he has come in contact in church music programmes."

When the Pius X School of Liturgical Music decided to produce its own hymnal, it was but natural that Theodore Marier was put in charge of the operation. "I then became acquainted with Mother Aileen Cohalan RSCJ, and then with Mother Josephine Morgan RSCJ, who over a period of several years succeeded each other as directors of the School" (he said), "and thus wound up in charge of producing what became the very successful Pius X Hymnal. My editorial experience with M & R Co. made the development of a hymnal, specially designed for St. Paul's, predictable. This book, which we now know and use, is, of course, *Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Canticles*." That book, now happily being reprinted with the revised responsorial psalms completed by Marier himself shortly before his death, surely deserves the title bestowed on it by Thomas Day ("Why Catholics Can't Sing"): the "noble lion of American Catholic hymnals."

But the ground bass of Theodore Marier's activity as a church musician, was certainly the "chant proper to the Roman liturgy," Gregorian chant. Its effective propagation through the Ward Method forms the last important chapter in his life.

In his own words, "Justine Ward was the author of a widely used method of teaching the elements of music to children. As a method it was designed to be an important component in the curriculum of the Catholic schools. Its music pedagogy focused on the fundamentals of musical literacy with a special emphasis on Gregorian chant. Through my connection with Dom Gajard, I was introduced to Mrs. Ward in 1960. Because I expressed interest in her method, uniquely designed to train Catholic children in music, she provided me with grants to study at the Abbey of Solesmes in France and to take Ward Method courses offered each year in Paris (Mlle Odette Hertz) and in Cambridge, England (now Dr Mary Berry). Upon my return from these training periods abroad, I immediately began to use the Method at St. Paul's by teaching the first three grades. As it turned out, there could have been no better preparation for me in view of the plan to teach the children of the choir school. Justine Ward began to formulate the details of her Method in the early 20's. It made its way into the schools of Holland, France and Italy. An edition—"English was prepared for use in this country and it soon became widely used in many of our large dioceses. When I met her in 1960, Mrs. Ward was in the process of revising the Method and updating some of the material. She invited me to participate in this revision but unfortunately, as age was beginning to take its toll, she was unable to complete the work herself. Since that time I have been commissioned to continue the revision, a project which still occupies me. I am happy to say that the Ward Method has been and still is the basis of the teaching method at the Boston Archdiocese Choir School."

Theodore Marier's last years were actively spent in teaching Gregorian chant at The Catholic University in Washington and (for ten years) at the annual summer Music Colloquium held at Christendom College, collaborating in the production of Gregorian chant CDs such as the award-winning "Women in Chant" recorded in 1996 with the Benedictine nuns of the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem CT, and publishing chant texts such as the "Gregorian Chant Practicum" and the "Ten Commandments of Gregorian Interpretation" which he completed shortly before his death. The task of continuing such initiatives and if possible expanding them, is the *officium nobile* of Theodore Marier's disciples and successors at the Centre for Ward Method Studies of the Catholic University of America in Washington.

The accomplishments of Marier's long career were widely recognized. For instance, he was Mus.doc.h.c. of St. Anselm College (1996), honorary Doctor of Music of the Catholic University in Washington (1984), and Mus.sac.doc.h.c. of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome (1984). Pope John Paul II named him a Knight Commander in the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great in 1984, a form of recognition which meant a great deal to the deserving recipient.

When one thinks back over the long life and accomplishments of such a prominent Catholic Church musician, and attempts to evaluate the significance of his role during the last half of the Twentieth century, one is struck by the concentric circles of his ever increasing sphere of influence. It begins at the parish and diocesan level (St. Paul's Boston), spreads to the national level (M&R editor, hymnals, CMAA President) and then reaches the international stage (Ward Method, recordings, etc.). And the humus or native soil in which the man's talents blossomed and grew--*numine afflatur!*-- was his solid family background rooted in a vibrant Catholic Faith. Theodore Marier had no doubts about the correct answer to the great question posed so many years ago by Benedictine Abbott Ildefons Herwegen to the men of his age, and of ours: "What think ye of the Church?" The praying Church has a compelling mandate to reveal in resonant sound the glorification of God which lies hidden in the kosmos, to transpose it and to spiritualize it into the gesture of praise through song (J. RATZINGER). Theodore Marier never forgot the propose of the Christian religion is to bring us as transfigured Christians to the transfigured Christ: the idea of a Christian transfiguration is the art-principle of the Catholic liturgy. Theodore Marier's untiring application of this great principle to pastoral praxis lay in a direct line from the examples set by St. Pius X, passed on by Augustine Hickey, and come to resonant fruition in the *ecclesia et cantetans*, the Church which sings its prayer *ante faciem Domini, donec venit*. It is here that Theodore Marier's real legacy is to be found.

Members of the Church Music Association of America will remember in particular the notable contribution of the St. Paul's Choir at the opening Pontifical Mass of the Fifth International Church Music Congress. On Thursday 25 August 1966 in Milwaukee's St. John's Cathedral, Theodore Marier conducted his lads and singing men in the world premiere of Ned Rorem's newly commissioned English Propers for the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, with Anthony Newman at the new Noehren organ installed for the occasion. Three days later, at the business meeting of the CMAA, Marier was elected President, an office he filled most capably until 1970. His General Secretary during those years, now his far less worthy successor, can testify to the affectionate esteem which every member of the Association felt for their Honorary Life Member, and on their behalf he pledges a grateful remembrance in prayer. *Ave, pia anima!*

FR. ROBERT SKERIS

Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life and death
called
Prof. dr.h.c. Theodore N. Marier, KCSG
Director of the Centre for Ward Method Studies
at the Catholic University of America,
founder of the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School
at St. Paul's, Cambridge MA
and former President of the Church Music
Association of America
to his eternal reward at 0130 hours on Saturday
24 February 2001
as a result of respiratory failure caused by
pulmonary alveolar fibrosis,
in the 88th year of his life.
The Requiem Mass will be celebrated at 1030 hours
on Shrove Tuesday 2001 in St. Paul's Church
Cambridge MA.
R.I.P.
The Church Music Association of America
requests the alms of an Ave for the repose of his soul.
With great gratitude we shall hold his memory
in high honour.

For the CMAA
Rev. Robert A. Skeris
President

25 February 2001