

A SERVICE IN CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF HERMAN FREDERICK REISSIG
COMPLETE TEXT OF SERVICE June 23, 1985

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SERVICE:

The Reverend A.J. (Dell) Buttrey, retired pastor and former Oregon Conference Minister

The Chancel Choir, The First Congregational Church, Old Greenwich

The Reverend Ray Gibbons, former Director of Council for Christian Social Action, an agency of
Congregational Christian Churches and later the United Church of Christ

The Reverend Dale M. Greene, Associate Pastor, The First Congregational Church, Old
Greenwich

The Reverend L. Alexander (Zan) Harper, Senior Minister of The New England Congregational
Church, Aurora, Illinois

The Reverend R. Alan Johnson, Secretary, Evangelism, for the United Church Board for
Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ

Daniel N. Reissig, Herman's son, of Montclair, New Jersey

Richard A. Reissig, Herman's son, of Teaneck, New Jersey

Scott A. Youngs, organist, The First Congregational Church, Old Greenwich

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
(United Church of Christ) Old Greenwich, Connecticut
A Service in Celebration of the Life of
HERMAN F. REISSIG
8 p.m., June 23, 1985

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRELUDES

"Prelude and Fugue in E Flat" (*ST. ANNE*)

Johann Sebastian Bach

"Tocatta" from Symphony V

Charles Marie Widor

Scott Youngs, organist

PROCESSIONAL HYMN 366

CWM RHONDDA

"God of Grace and God of Glory" (verses 1, 3 & 5)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Dale M. Greene

We are gathered here this evening to worship God and to celebrate the life of Herman Frederick
Reissig, a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Praise God for the love which brings us
together.

OPENING REMARKS

Welcome to you all. It was Herman Reissig's wish that this evening's service be a celebration of
life -- a celebration of the gift of life itself. Amidst music that gave Herman joy and meaning;

amidst the words of prayer, and scripture and reflections; amidst the whole of this worship service is Herman's call again to us to celebrate and savor the wonder of God's gift to us of life. We want as many as possible to be included in this celebration. For those of Herman's family, and of our church family who are not able to be with us this evening, the service is being videotaped.

On October 10, 1982 at First Church Herman prefaced a sermon with these personal remarks. I quote from his text:

"On the 15th of October, ten years ago, I preached my first sermon from this pulpit, having arrived in Old Greenwich eight days earlier to help Zan Harper provide spiritual sustenance pending the arrival of a permanent pastor.

A ten-year stretch of living is ordinarily no great shakes, but an interim minister is usually expected to stay for a few months and then to disappear back to where he came from. I found life among you so appealing that, hearing no violent objections, I decided to stick around. And when on a July Sunday in 1973 you, to my astonished ears, elevated me from the lower class status of interim pastor to the ecclesiastical nobility of Pastor Emeritus, I had to stay around, if for no better reason than for the ego-inflationary pleasure of seeing my name with that title in the newspaper and Sunday bulletin every week.

That title is sometimes almost embarrassing. When a stranger noting the title asks me, as one did a few weeks ago, how many years I was pastor here, I get a funny look when I say, "About nine months." Perhaps bribery is suspected. There is one facet of the matter that gives me some amusement. A church can fire an installed, full-time pastor on three months notice. There is no known procedure for firing a pastor emeritus. Absent from heinous public misbehavior, you are stuck with me, at least in print, as long as I live."

Herman Reissig died Sunday, June 16th, 1985. Herman's life with us has ended. But never the end of the influence his life has had on each one of us; never the end of his life - valued, loved, and known by God.

INVOCATION

Spirit of God, enter each one of us this night. Draw us together as one, from whatever walks of life we come, from whatever parts of Herman's life we come. We are but fragile human beings ever in need of your forgiveness and guidance. Be now our strength and comfort as we experience the sadness of death and loss. Fill us with resurrection hope and purpose for the future. Help us be open to your vision of truth and life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Let us pray together Herman's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, entitled "The Lord's Prayer Today."

Our Father/Mother God who art
above, around and within us.

Let your Being and your creation
be held in reverence.

May we live more and more in
love and mutual helpfulness,

looking forward to the time when
your purpose comes to fulfillment.

While we live on earth let us
not cease from the struggle to know
and do your will in the Here and Now.

May we strive unceasingly to provide
food for all who live on earth.

Let not our waywardness and foolish-
ness build a wall between you and us
or between us and our neighbors.

Let your presence steer us away from
temptations that may be too strong for us.

Liberate us from the evil of self-serving
aggression against the well-being of
the earth and against our neighbors.

Not unto us but unto you, creator,
sustainer and friend, be all honor
and glory. Amen.

July 25, 1984

ANTHEM

"The Old Hundredth Psalm Tune arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams
The Chancel Choir

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

From Psalm 8, Psalm 90 and Psalm 139

Daniel N. Reissig

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all
the earth!

Thou whose glory above the heavens
is chanted
by the mouth of babes and
infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because
of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the
avenger.

When I look at thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which
thou hast established;

what is man that thou are mindful
of him,
and the son of man that thou dost
care for him?

Yet thou hast made him little less
than God,
and dost crown him with glory
and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over
the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his
feet,
all sheep and oxen
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of
the sea,
whatever passes along the paths
of the sea.

O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all
the earth!

Psalm 90: 1-6

Lord, thou hast been our
dwelling place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought
forth,
or ever thou hadst formed the
earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting
thou art God.

Thou turnest man back to the dust,
and sayest, "Turn back, O children
of men!"
For a thousand-years in thy sight
are but as yesterday when it is
past,
or as a watch in the night.

Thou dost sweep men away; they
are like a dream,
like grass which is renewed in
the morning:
in the morning it flourishes and is
renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

Psalm 139:7-12, 17 and 18

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy
presence?

If I ascend to heaven, thou art
there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, thou
art there!

If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts
of the sea,

even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Let only darkness cover
me,

and the light about me be night,
even the darkness is not dark to
thee,

the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with thee.

How precious to me are thy
thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

If I would count them, they are
more than the sand.

When I awake, I am still with
thee.

NEW TESTAMENT READINGS

From Romans 8, John 11 and John 14

Romans 8:35, 37-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 11:25 and 26

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

John 14:1-3, and 27

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

* REFLECTIONS A. J. Buttrey

* REFLECTIONS Ray Gibbons

HYMN 399

"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" ST. MARGARET

* REFLECTIONS L. Alexander Harper

* REFLECTIONS R. Alan Johnson

* The texts of the four REFLECTIONS are found at the end of this program.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING Dale M. Greene

Most gracious God, Creator and Giver of all Life, we give you joyful thanks for all of Herman's life, for all that he was, for all that he became. You filled his life from beginning to end with blessings — recognized and unrecognized — all of which served to shape the heart and mind of this man as he grew in life and ministry. You guided him to be an asker of questions and inspired him to listen to the world and to life. And listen he did! Through the years his listening was matched by knowledge and wisdom and a keen perception of the wonder of you and of your creation. And we give thanks he spent most of his life calling us, your people, to faith and goodness and helping us along the way. You inspired Herman to discern the infinite variety and vulnerability of human life, to value all human beings; to strive for justice and peace, goodness and wholeness for all people; to grow in his faith in you.

O God, you knew Herman as boy and man and all the years of developing and maturing along the way. From his treasured experience as a boy, watching Halley's Comet with his mother, both he and she in their nightgowns, standing in awe on a country road looking up at that shimmering miracle in the sky, to his experiences of adulthood as pastor-preacher, orator, writer, shaker-of-the-foundations, you, O God, have been at his side. You knew him as son, brother, husband, father, uncle, grandfather, mentor and friend. Above all you knew him as an honest man striving for wholeness, aware of his fragile humanness yet drawn powerfully by your word in Jesus Christ, opening him to new life and new understandings of that word as history unfolds. Though a man born before the turn of the century, Herman was amazingly a man of contemporary times and thought. For that we give thanks.

You were with him in his heights and his depths. You helped him discover his motto "Get up and go on," which moved him through the difficult times. All who knew him, most likely knew Herman could be so many things — direct, outspoken, persistent, demanding — yet also compassionate, warm, tender, sensitive and loving. He abhorred blandness and pretense and was impatient with anyone who wasted life in that way. He balanced all this with a marvelous sense of humor, witty, earthy and endearing. A great ability to laugh at himself. O God, how we give thanks for that and his wonderful laughter.

In these last years of increased frailty and decreased vigor, Herman relied more and more on the simple gifts of life — good friends, good conversations, his family, his garden where his

tomatoes and flowers delighted him, good music and his reading. How he loved his books, magazines and newspapers.

We all have special thoughts about Herman and special memories of him. So many memories spoken and unspoken. We lift them all to your loving care and understanding. For all the ways Herman has touched our lives, we give you thanks. Only you, God, knew Herman throughout all his years on this earth. You knew him, God. You know him and hold him in your love.

Merciful God,

Comfort us in our sorrow. By your gracious spirit, bring Herman's loved ones courage and hope in your promise of new life for them as well as Herman who is now at rest and at home with you for evermore. Herman wants us to "Get up and go on." With your help we will.

Through your son Jesus Christ who came as a light into our darkness, we pray to you to fill our lives with your healing light and hope. Amen.

STATEMENT

This service comes to an end with words for us and to us chosen from among Herman's many writings — a pastoral prayer, a hymn, and the Benediction — and finally, at his request, the joyful "Hallelujah" from the Messiah.

Before we follow the words of Herman's Benediction to "go forth," we ask you to be seated and remain seated for the Postlude, after which, Herman's family will be escorted to the Auditorium. The choir will follow, and then the congregation.

And, now, during a few moments of silence, let us center ourselves in the assurance of God's healing and loving presence.

A TIME OF SILENCE

PASTORAL PRAYER

R. Alan Johnson

written by Herman F. Reissig

Eternal Spirit, within and around us, never seen with our eyes but coming through to us in a thousand ways: sometimes in great joy, sometimes in deep sorrow, sometimes when life is smooth, sometimes when it is rough, sometimes when we are afraid, sometimes when we are brave, in sunshine or in storm, in youth or in old age — to this house of worship we come to be reminded of what we often forget. Here deep calls to deep and our earth-bound minds are given wings.

God, we mean to be grateful, for we know we ought to be. If we are well, grateful for health; if we are sick, grateful for doctors, nurses and for friends who stand by us; if we are young, grateful for youthful zest and years ahead in which to live and love and test ourselves; if we are old, grateful for what we have had. Grateful for success and for those without whom no success was possible. Grateful for defeats that have taught us endurance and humility. Grateful for men and women, past and present, who by their courage help to make us strong. Grateful that we can put out a hand to one another. Grateful for beauty in sea, woods, mountain, in music and art. Grateful for food that sustains us, for farmers who grow it and for those who set it before us. Grateful for our church, a part of the church universal, where we feel our oneness with our neighbors and with all humanity. Grateful for hope that, after discouragement and defeat, surges back to life.

We are grateful for our country and for the good that others in other lands find in their countries. God, we acknowledge that we are in debt and can never repay what we have received. Thanksgiving and praise be to you, O God, for the gift of life and for all your mercies. Amen.

HYMN

"For Living Saints Who Labor Bravely On"

text: Herman F. Reissig

tune: Pilgrim Hymnal 306

1. For living saints who labor bravely on,
Who keep the faith through battles lost or won,
To Christ, their leader, let our praise be sung:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
2. In days of joy, in suffering's darkest night,
Be thou, O Christ, their constant, shining light,
That none may falter in the fiercest fight:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
3. O may all Christians be as true and bold
As those who lived and died in days of old,
That in our time the Good News may be told:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
4. Bind all together in love's service strong,
Fighting for all 'gainst ev'ry human wrong,
That all may join in resurrection song:
Alleluia! Alleluia!

BENEDICTION

Go forth from this place to live with courage and hope.
Go forth to be helpers of humankind, the near and the far.
Go forth with thanksgiving for those who have finished their earthly course.
Go forth with joy in the wonder of life.
Go in peace. Amen.

Herman F. Reissig, Easter, 1977

POSTLUDE

"Hallelujah" from MESSIAH
horn soloist: Richard A. Reissig

IN MEMORIAM: HERMAN REISSIG

June 23, 1985

A. J. Buttrey

Herman Reissig was my friend. Amid the fleeting years of our human mortality this is one of the most meaningful statements we can make about our personal relationships. He was my friend. It was a friendship that reached back through the years to almost half a century. And in these moments of memorial tribute, the memories, the good and joyful memories come crowding up from the years. It was almost fifty years ago that he and I found ourselves among the ministerial leaders of a high school youth conference at Blair Academy in New Jersey. He was a minister of a church in Brooklyn and I was pastor of a church in New Jersey.

There must be some kind of chemistry that causes two people to feel a kind of bond that brings them into a communion of spirit. I felt it when I first met Herman. I felt it keenly one evening at an after-dinner vesper service. The ministers took turns leading that service and it was Herman's turn. The young people were spread out informally across the lawn with the sun sinking in the west. The ministers had been giving short meditations, some of which sounded suspiciously like warmed-over portions of old sermons. But not Herman's. He began quoting poetry, poem after poem, all from memory — poems about faith, about God, God in nature, God in human relationships. That moment is etched strongly in my memory as the young people, in total silence and rapt attention, listened to his poetry as the long shadows crept across the lawn. I remember one poem he quoted — that lovely little bit that begins

I saw God wash the world last night
With his sweet showers on high,
And then when morning came
He hung it out to dry.

Coming down the years there is another memory that surfaces. It was just ten years ago this month that he and Florence flew out from Connecticut to join my wife and me in a tour we were escorting through the Canadian Rockies. We arrived at Lake Louise, that gem of pure loveliness in the heart of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks. From luxurious Chateau Lake Louise the little lake stretches out four or five miles long hemmed in by massive towering mountains, and in the distance the huge gleaming Victoria Glacier whose melting waters form the lake. We were walking with Herman and Florence along the edge of the lake with this magnificent grandeur surrounding us. Suddenly Herman's voice broke the silence as he quoted

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord
who made heaven and earth."

This is another vignette of memory which expresses the kind of spirit which was Herman's.

My friendship, beginning with Herman back in the '30s, had a variety of relationships. At one time during the '40s he was my parishioner, a member of my church in Montclair, New Jersey, where I was pastor. Every Sunday, when his work did not call him away, he sat in the pews while I, far less a preacher than he, proclaimed as best I could the gospel of Jesus Christ and its meaning in the world. And he was gracious and helpful in his comments. In fact, he was so helpful and had such penetrating insight that I am sure I became a better preacher because of

him. He taught me some things my professor of homiletics at Union Seminary never made quite clear.

Through most of the years our friendship was nourished by correspondence, and on occasions when we would see each other at denominational or national meetings of various kinds, we would get caught up on the every-day comings and goings of family life. But always the correspondence continued, and I have in my file a huge folder of those letters. And I had a standing order to receive every sermon he preached which was reproduced for distribution.

Herman was both a philosopher and a theologian and, combined with these qualities, he was also a scholar. All of these qualities show in his sermons as I have read them through the years. I wish I could have heard them preached, but they are compelling even in print — which can't be said about the average sermons which, with all due respect to my ministerial colleagues, are often pretty dry in print. Herman's were always exciting reading. They move along with inexorable impact to the final conclusion, summation or challenge, and one is moved to rise and applaud or even shout "Hallelujah!" He uses words with such exactness that takes the reader (and I am sure the hearer also) right to the point. I once commented on this quality in a letter to him. He replied with appreciation and added that all his life he kept a dictionary and a thesaurus close by, consulting them often in order to find the word with the right nuance of meaning he wanted to convey. His goal was to achieve clarity and conciseness in the use of language. He had a brain that could cut like a sword to the center of a problem and identify the critical points and bring into focus the basic elements. Again, I mentioned this in a letter to him and he commented in reply that one of his professors once said to him, "Reissig, you have a mind like a vise. You grip ideas and hold on to them and won't let them go until you understand them and all their implications."

Well, to call a man a scholar, a philosopher, a theologian, a master of lucid English is a pretty heavy load to pile on the back of one rather average sized man! But every one of these apply to Herman Reissig.

Yet, after applying all these towering qualities to him we must go on and add, "He was one great guy!" He had a tremendous sense of humor and loved a well-turned joke or story of which he had a substantial collection ready to spring. Again I recall that Canadian Rockies tour of ten years ago. I, too, enjoy a joke and the funny stories that can be told. From time to time I would regale our tour companions as we rolled along some less interesting part of the tour. Time and again Herman would come forward, grab the mike, and tell his own stories over the bus's P.A. system to the vast delight of the tour folk. To this day when I occasionally meet some of those folk who were with us they are quite likely to ask me about "that preacher who told such wonderful stories." But they never say a word about mine! He upstaged me at my own game — and that was great!

Yet with all these qualities he was a humble man who was aware of his limitations which we all share as mortal beings. In this, I am sure he understood St. Paul when the great Apostle once included himself among the sinners for whom Christ died. And, like St. Paul, Herman had a compelling sense of the meaning of Jesus Christ in human life and history. He had an awesome sense of that Towering Figure standing over human history, and of that Gospel by which men and nations and all aspects of society must be judged.

So in this moment of Memorial Tribute we say, "All Hail, Herman Reissig, All Hail!" We are strengthened and enriched by this warm and human spirit who shared so generously his life, his spirit, his mind with us.

REFLECTIONS
on the life of
HERMAN FREDERICK REISSIG
June 23, 1985
Ray Gibbons

Herman and I worked together in a small staff of the church agency for social action for about seventeen years. That was the longest working relationship either of us had in our entire adult life. It was a collegial relationship which grew and matured through the years.

Herman and I had both attended the 1934 General Council meeting of the Congregational Christian Churches held in Oberlin, Ohio. It was at that meeting in the midst of the Depression that the new agency for social concern, called the Council for Social Action, was born. We both gave it our strong support, little realizing that some years later we would be giving it a major portion of our working lives.

Soon, after I became director of the Council for Social Action in 1944, we needed to develop the program for study and action in international relations. At that time Herman had finished his pastorate in Quincy, Illinois, and was living in New York City. He had had considerable international experience directing the national program to aid the freedom fighters in the Spanish Civil War. He was highly esteemed by Roger Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, and many other national leaders in religious and civic agencies. But could he speak persuasively to lay members of our churches? Among others, I consulted with Dr. Douglas Horton, Minister and Chief Executive of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches. He responded enthusiastically, "Herman is one of the finest preachers in our whole denomination," he replied. There was no doubt that Herman could speak to church members! He had a penetrating mind and persuasive speech. So we soon began our work together, which continued for more than a decade and a half.

Herman was an answer to prayer. He settled into the work of international relations like a real professional. He enjoyed sorting out complex issues. His powerful commitment to freedom, justice and human welfare whetted his appetite to understand the most complex problems. He could interpret issues so they seemed clear and manageable. He could make average church members feel that they had a part to play in the unfolding of history.

When he came to this work the United Nations was being born, struggling for recognition and acceptance. While it was still located in Flushing Meadows on Long Island, he took groups of church people to see, to understand and to support this agency of hope and promise. When the United Nations relocated in Manhattan, he had his office directly across First Avenue on the ninth floor of the Church Center for the United Nations. He could see the whole United Nations complex in a single glance. He knew how it worked and he knew many of its staff, with whom he worked in mutually helpful programs.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Herman developed programs on the Marshall Plan, resettlement of refugees and reconstruction in Europe. There were perplexing problems in the Middle East and the decolonized areas of Africa. Herman worked with leaders in government, education and civic affairs, finding ways in which churches and members could helpfully engage in the healing of the nations. He was held in high regard by those in other denominations working for peace and justice, especially by Dr. Walter Van Kirk, the executive of International Relations of the National Council of Churches.

In those years, the Congregational Christian Churches were merging with the Evangelical and Reformed denomination, and Herman gave that program his powerful support. In the process the Council for Social Action became the Council for Christian Social Action.

During his years with the social action agency Herman did a great deal of excellent writing, including letters to the New York Times, the Christian Century, the denominational publication, Advance (later A.D.), and the Council's monthly magazine "Social Action." He found time to write and publish a book for church members on world problems entitled "Man's New Home."

In the McCarthy period the agencies for social action in the churches were under attack, and Herman did not escape criticism. But he was able to respond in a manner which converted many of his critics and always commended him to others for his command of facts and figures, meanings and their implications. He was widely appreciated among the churches of the United Church of Christ and in the Councils of Churches.

Another role Herman filled so well was to plan and conduct travel seminars abroad. He knew the leaders in government and society who could help the study group understand problems and relate to the people. He took such groups to the trouble spots of Europe, Middle East and Africa. In conferences and seminars around this country he was a skilled and appreciated interpreter. He had clear insights, fair judgments and broad perspectives. He could make complex issues clear and could calm the troubled waters. He was an interpreter of Christian faith and values in a troubled society.

Herman usually became the life of any social gathering, large or small. He could regale a group with his skits and antics. He formed deep friendships with his colleagues and won their enduring respect and admiration.

We have now been separated from our life-long colleague and close friend, Herman. We are confident he is now being welcomed by a far greater Friend who says to Herman, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

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HERMAN FREDERICK REISSIG: A REMEMBRANCE

June 23, 1985

L. Alexander Harper

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.
Memorial Day Address, 1884

I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time, at peril of being judged not to have lived.

The best thing I ever did for this church was to persuade its leaders to call up Herman Reissig from premature retirement in Florida to join me in a memorable interim ministry here fifteen years ago. When it was all over for both of us, Herman stayed on in the church and community. When First Church honored him by declaring him "minister emeritus," Herman accepted with an almost immodest alacrity. But then he added, "If you know your Latin, you'll understand how appropriate that title is. "E" means "out," and "meritus" means "he deserved it."

This ability to take the world seriously but himself lightly is the first thing I celebrate in the life of Herman Reissig.

He took the world seriously by caring deeply about people, and therefore about the social structures in which their lives were enmeshed, often to their hurt or even enslavement. His fine - and still very relevant book, "Man's New Home" -- opens with these characteristic words:

My primary interest is not in politics or social orders.

The emphasis is on man, on the living person. All social institutions are secondary, derivative, merely instrumental. This seems to me to be the Christian approach.

That sort of personalism mirrors Herman's approach to all social policy. "What will it do to people?" This man really cared about people, even or especially when he disagreed with them.

Together with a razor-sharp mind and good work habits, this caring also made him a fine Secretary for International Relations for almost two decades with our denomination's Council for Christian Social Action in the 50's and 60's. I was his close colleague on that staff in his second decade there. Herman became a guru, a father-figure and role-model for me. Though my assignments were in race relations, public education and hunger on the domestic front, I sometimes helped Herman in his seminars on global issues. How I admired his analytical powers, his boldness and freedom in demolishing sacred cows and racial and national stereotypes! How I liked his encouragements to others to think for themselves, and appreciations so genuinely expressed of those with other points of view!

Once, on the shortest possible notice, I had to take Herman's place. A sudden attack of laryngitis made him lose his voice. I had to deliver Herman's own address on what he called "The War System," with Herman himself sitting in the audience. Remembering what a good mimic Herman himself was of Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and other notables, I decided to go for broke and deliver the lecture as Herman himself might have done, complete with Reissigian emphases and gestures. I think he was dumbfounded but pleased withal to hear himself as others heard him.

More seriously, and I hope that Ray Gibbons and Lewis Haddock will agree with me -- they were our executive directors during the 50's and 60's on the national social action staff -- Herman Reissig became our most eminent, effective and most widely respected staff member in

Christian, interfaith and secular circles. He was a pioneer in shaping effective study-and-action patterns on global issues for ordinary Christians, for T. C. Mwips, if you will. T. C. Mwips? The Celebrated Man and Woman in the Pews, of course.

Yvonne Delk, executive director of our successor-agency, the Office for Church in Society, is particularly anxious that this lasting work of Herman Reissig, with still-radiating influences, be fully recognized.

My time is at an end. If time allowed, I should go on to illustrate what more I cherished in Herman Reissig -- as in his lively imagination, flair and freshness of expression, and his amazing vitality and empathy with younger thinkers, his wide-ranging reading and deepening theological interests in his last years. In retrospect maybe he was cramming for his finals. He never got locked into one generation's orthodoxies, either in theology or in social thought.

A favorite cartoon from the New Yorker shows the bartender talking to a new customer about a despondent, older man at the other end of the bar. "Poor fellow," the bartender says, "--he used to be an engaging conversationalist, but all the wild, far-out things he used to talk about are painfully obvious to everybody nowadays." Not so with Herman: he stayed ahead of his times, so much so that youthful admirers remain legion to this day.

Indulge me two quotations and I am done. These, taken together, characterize Herman Reissig for me. The first is from an 1884 Memorial Day address by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (the jurist, not the doctor):

I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time, at peril of being judged not to have lived.

In that sense Herman Reissig lived and lived fully to the hilt.

The other is an extract from one of Herman's own pastoral prayers in this church on a Music Sunday five years ago:

Sing, my soul! Sing the greatness and wonder of life. Sing faith against despair. Sing beauty against drabness. Sing life against death. With lifted voice, with string and horn, with bell and organ pipe, with drum and cymbal, sing the glory of God and the goodness and promise of life. O my soul, cease from sighing. Listen to the singing.

Herman Reissig listened to the singing, until he himself became part of the song. He still is part of it.

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Reflections on the Life of the Rev. Dr. Herman F. Reissig
By The Rev. R. Alan Johnson
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How Herman would have loved to have been here in person, to preach, and not to avoid adulation, humbly. Also, he'd have liked to hear the music which he wrote "substitutes wings for plodding feet and wipes the dust from our spirits." I will use many of Herman's words in this celebration of his life.

One of God's prophetic correspondents has died. You see, Herman was on divine assignment to keep attuned to what is happening in the world with antennae perked to God's work of justice and peace. Then Herman gave us interim reports through sermons, and voluminous letters, in discussions at meals and even Second Hours; through judiciously crafted words at baptisms and funerals and weddings; at ordinations and parties, he got to us, prophetically reporting on God's work in the world and our part in it. He touched head and heart -- moving us to tears and chuckles and belly laughs; to disagreement and disturbance and assent; to challenge and change. He got inside us with his prophetic voice.

Abraham Heschel writes "a prophet is one who interferes." So Herman told us: "Justice and only justice shall you seek." "In speaking the truth in love, let us remember that love may require speaking unpalatable truths." So the present administration in Washington (and how could we not refer to this on Herman's behalf) stands judged as dangerous. A prophet looks at the present with critical eyes and a gospel vision. So was Herman's assignment to be one of God's prophetic correspondents. "Damn the secular world's torpedoes --full speed ahead!" He charged!

Herman stirred us for he got underneath the surface, not to hurt, but to expose what is true. He summed up his advice once this way: "be young all your life and say things to the world that are true." And just within this year he wrote, "my ears are age 98, my eyes are age 75, but I can keep my spirit at age 30." He was not a natural believer, in his words, but one who "cries from the depths rather than sings from a mountain top." The Biblical character Jacob wrestled at the Jabbok with the Angel, wresting meaning. Herman was such a God-wrestler; one who had the fire of mind and emotion to stir and feed us in our depths.

If we do not find ourselves struggling more with how our faith makes sense in this radically changed world; or how our religious language can more adequately convey new truths; or how accommodation with the status quo is in itself a death; or how to be constructively at odds with society, then we've still not heard this prodding, sometimes irascible prophetic voice. Thanks be for the Catholic Bishops' letters on peace and economic justice and for the words of Schillebeeckx, particularly. These fed Herman's thinking heart of late and underscored again his uneasy love of the church. He wrote, "All Christians ought to agree ... moral responsibility entails political responsibility and therefore a church that stands aloof from politics is not responsibly carrying out its mission." Herman led us not to avoid prickly subjects. This he did to ennoble, not denigrate; to use his mind in the service of Christ. Out of friendship he interfered. He wrote, "There is salt and vinegar as well as sugar in friendship. True friendship includes candor." He lauded "friends who do not limit their response to compliments," although he did decide against the following as a possible book title: "Letters to Conservatives and Other Sinners." Herman could be prophetic with all ages and persons with very differing beliefs because he was also a lover of persons.

Herman exhibited vigilant attention to language: "Do not muffle your words;" a summons to an athletic intellect: "Don't skimp on hard thinking;" an invitation to voracious reading: "Let us sit at the feet of scholars;" and showed a penetrating wit to undo whatever was false: "What's the point of driving in the fast lane if the road goes to no good place?"

Herman's theology is theocentric humanism. "I became a watcher and student of human life," he wrote, "that is to say, a pastor/ preacher, an asker of questions about who we are and why we are as we are and what the future may hold for us." For faith to be alive it had to be explicated in "warm, human terms." No theological pabulum endured. So when words today tend to laminate our souls with verbal plastic, Herman's word was to wake us up from our stupor and be captivated and fascinated by being human.

"Human life," he wrote, "is an awesome thing and my passion is to find new and better ways to keep the sense of its greatness, immortality or no immortality, God or no God." He exhorted us to "keep earthy with Jesus." Herman was known for his repugnance of mediocre theology which sentimentalizes God or flaccid words which make Jesus bloodless. He confessed that Lincoln, Gandhi and Einstein are all a "part of my inner being" because they convey the powerful spirit of Jesus, the one who was fully human. Herman, divine wrestler with clay feet, lived his conviction that "the demand for a transcendent meaning does not die. It cannot die because it is the essence of what it means to be human. God is at the center of the search to be human.

Once when Herman came to preach at the church I served in Sharon, Connecticut, he asked to borrow a white shirt. After the service Marion, my wife, asked if Herman realized the shirt he had on was the one I wore when she and I were married. Herman retorted, "Well, yes, this morning I did feel particularly warm." A man of passion, he was connected to the earth through his tomatoes, and strawberries; to Eros through books and daffodils, hyacinths and tulips; to Agape through his family as in his admission "grand-parentage is my favorite occupation;" and to the Holy through friends, conversation, music, poetry, "Christianity and Crisis," and The New York Times.

He declared, "Get up and go on. Death is real, but life is stronger." Quoting Unamuno, he troubled us with this benediction: "May God deny you peace and grant you glory." Glory time has come for Herman as well as peace at the last.

The final words Herman spoke to me at the hospital two weeks ago tonight as I paced around nervously; leaned over to speak and to hear; held his hand, were "Relax, Alan, I'll be fine in the morning." The Psalmist's words shine through these words: "weeping tarries for the night, but joy comes in the morning."

I miss Herman terribly. And still we rejoice; we thank God for Herman. One of God's prophetic correspondents has finished this part of his assignment.

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