Power and Powerlessness: A Personal Perspective

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> You shall have joy, or you shall have power, said God; you shall not have both.
> —Emerson

> To be alive is power,
> Existing in itself,
> Without a further function,
> Omnipotence enough.
> —Emily Dickinson

IN HIS BOOK *POWER AND INNOCENCE*, Rollo May defines power as "the ability to cause or prevent change." May identifies five kinds of power: exploitative, "the simplest and, humanly speaking, most destructive kind of power"; manipulative, which is "power over another person"; competitive, "power *against* another"; nutrient, "power *for* the other"; and integrative, "power *with* another person."[1] May argues that all five kinds of power are present in healthy individuals, and that "the goal for human development is to learn to use these different kinds of power in ways adequate to the given situation."[2] He makes a distinction between what he calls the lower forms of power—those which are exploitative and manipulative—and the higher forms, those which are nutrient and integrative. He argues that the lower on the scale we go, the more power is associated with violence, and the higher on the scale we go, the more it is a manifestation of love.[3]

As a white American male I was taught to pursue power as measured in the marketplace—through wealth (although I never had much, I was always eager to get more); through rank (I was aggressive in advancing to the top academic

1. Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (New York: Norton, 1972), 105-110.
2. Ibid., 113.
3. Ibid., 118.

rung in my profession); through position (I knew I could pick up a telephone and mention my title, and the person to whom I was speaking would take me seriously); and through perquisites that go with position. I was aggressive in the pursuit and use of these traditionally masculine kinds of power.

In the church I was also taught in subtle ways to be aware of power. I grew up viewing the priesthood in terms of hierarchical power. I was pleased to be advanced to the Melchizedek priesthood and to be ordained in turn an elder, seventy, and high priest. Sometimes when I saw others whom I considered less capable or less worthy advanced to high positions, I felt diminished and less powerful. Like most men in the church, I have occasionally used priesthood power inappropriately, including within my own home. I have at times exercised too much control and compulsion over the hearts of God's children, some of whom happened also to be my children.

Perhaps I was more vigorous in the pursuit of power because as a child I experienced profound powerlessness. Having been abused and abandoned, I did not see myself as a powerful person. In fact, I felt impotent in the face of the powerful and often violent adults in my environment. Whatever power I had was devoted to preserving some vestige of ego that helped me to survive with my sense of self intact.

Ten years ago I sustained a series of losses that provided an opportunity to consider power and powerlessness in a new way. Over the course of several years, I retired from the directorship of a large academic department (thereby surrendering many of the traditional perquisites of power), was released as bishop of a ward I had served for more than five years, suffered some financial setbacks, was involved in a serious automobile accident, and went to live for nearly four years in the former Soviet Union under dramatically less comfortable circumstances than I had enjoyed in the United States. These losses—of position, prestige, power, influence, financial security, and physical strength—gave me an opportunity to challenge my pursuit of traditional kinds of power, to explore my fear of powerlessness, and to examine my spiritual life in relation to a myriad of issues having to do with power. Losing the traditional kinds of power—those most closely associated with assertiveness, manipulation, and competitiveness—put me in closer touch with the higher kinds of power associated with nurturing and integration.

One of the realizations I came to is that in pursuing traditional kinds of power in my professional, church, and personal life—most associated with patriarchy—I had neglected other kinds of power. One of these was the power of creative expression, especially the power of poetry. Freed from administrative duties that had occupied so much of my time as a university and church administrator, I found the space in my life to read and write more poetry than I ever had before. I discovered (or perhaps rediscovered) that there is a transformative power in language. As John F. Kennedy said in a speech at Amherst College in 1963, "When power leads a man to arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of a man's concerns, poetry reminds him

of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human trust which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment."[4]

What is true of poetry is also true of the other arts. No longer occupied by administrative responsibilities, I have had more time for reading, for theater, for music, and for art. I also have had more time for reflection and contemplation. Theodore Roethke asks, "What is freedom for?" His answer: "To know eternity."[5] In my freedom, I am enjoying the time to think more about eternal things.

Most importantly, I have expanded my understanding that the greatest power is love and the greatest use of power is loving. I am grateful that giving up other kinds of power has given me more time to love my wife and to discover the power we have in loving one another. It has been one of the great blessings of my life to understand how deep, abiding, and joyful marriage can be. As Rainer Maria Rilke observes, "For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final proof, the work for which all other work is merely a preparation. . . .[Love is] a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself [or herself] to become a world. . .for the sake of another person; it is a great demanding claim. . .something that chooses [a man and a woman out of the world] and calls [them] to vast distances."[6]

The same can be said about my relationships with my children. Even though our children have all married and established their own homes, over the past several years I have had more time to work on my relationships with them. I now also have the joy of establishing relationships with my grandchildren and, hopefully, benefiting from the mistakes I made with my own children. I also have had more communication with my family of origin and have been able to undertake some of the intergenerational work that I have prepared for in therapy over the years. I am grateful for Wendy Ulrich's important article in *Sunstone*, entitled "Not for Adam's Transgression: Paths to Intergenerational Peace,"[7] for its perceptive insights into how we can find the power through the principles and ordinances of the gospel to break the negative influences from past generations that can free them and us. To quote Chauncey Riddle, "The greatest joy [in this life] comes in perfecting the family associations which the New and Everlasting Covenant offers in this existence."[8] I am excited about the possibilities of that power for my own family—past, present, and future.

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4. *New York Times*, October 27, 1963, 87.

5. "I Knew A Woman," in *Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 127.

6. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, http://www.sfgoth.com/~immanis/rilke/letter7.html.

7. *Sunstone* 15, no. 5 (November 1991): 30-38.

8. "What a Privilege to Believe!" *Sunstone* 12, no. 3 (May 1988): 9.

The first time I felt powerful as a child was when I was introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ at the age of ten. From that time onward, I had a sense that there was a God who loved me and that there were other people who would love me and provide the safety and security lacking in my own home. To have the spirit bear witness to me that I was God's child had a profound effect on my life. To have a patriarch lay hands on my head a couple of years later and speak to me as though he were intimately acquainted with my soul gave my life a sense of direction and destiny. Since he lived in a distant stake, the patriarch knew nothing of my family or background, which were completely lacking in anything associated with an academic or artistic life. In fact, our home had been singularly bereft of culture, and yet when Patriarch Alma Davis laid his hands on my head, he said, "Develop these beautiful gifts and talents with which [the Lord] has blessed you, the beautiful in music, the beautiful in thought, the beautiful in literature and the higher and finer things of life. Seek after these things and you will be lead into the paths of truth and righteousness."

As my life unfolded in the church, I gained an even greater sense of personal power. The more I applied the principles of the gospel to my daily life, the more I tried to integrate the teachings of Christ into my behavior, and the more knowledge I gained about who I was and what my purpose was, the more I was able to transcend the powerlessness of my childhood.

Since, as the Doctrine and Covenants tells us, it is the "nature and disposition of almost all men" (121:39) to abuse power, many of us have had some experience with being abused by those in authority. But we have also been blessed by those who used priesthood power "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge" (D&C 121:41-42). Also, through fasting, praying, serving in callings, going to the temple, doing missionary work, performing community service, and participating in other programs and activities, we have seen spiritual power work as a positive force in our own and others' lives. I believe the scriptures are a particular source of power, for when we read stories of God acting in the lives of others, it emboldens us to believe that he can act in our lives as well. When we see others acting with power for good, we know that we too can act in this way.

During the years I served as a bishop, I learned a great deal about power. I viewed the power of a bishop as a sacred stewardship, one that could too easily, even unknowingly, be abused. Never have I tried to use power with the humility and respect I did as a bishop, especially in trying to bless the lives of others. In this calling I understood in a new way what I had discovered as a boy: that the power of God and Christ can work through and in us to change us individually and ultimately to change the world.

As a bishop I also learned more about personal powerlessness. I ministered almost daily to people who felt powerless, often as a result of being subject to the abuse of power by others. This abuse—physical, sexual, and emotional—gave its victims the sense that they were powerless (as indeed they often were). As they continued to act out that powerlessness in adulthood, nega-

tive effects could be seen in their relations with family and friends, in their romantic relationships, and in their relationships with God.

Sometimes the sense of powerlessness experienced by these people was a result of their own choices. Some had given up so much power that they scarcely had any personal landscape over which they could claim ownership. In such cases, I tried to convince them that their personal landscape was their birthright, and that, in spite of what others had done to them or what they had done to themselves, they could begin reclaiming it step by step. I tried to convince them that in the gospel of Christ and in his kingdom there is immense power. It was exciting to see individuals begin to act with faith in their own power to repent, to diminish the negative influences from their past, and to magnify their power through priesthood blessings, loving attention from visiting and home teachers, fasting and prayer, temple worship, and other redemptive experiences.

I believe one of the most profound teachings of the gospel is that we have the hope of ultimate power within ourselves. If indeed we are gods in embryo, then we already have the seeds of power that will enable us to create worlds, command light, and have dominion over space and time. We have within us the potential to live in a glory brighter than the light of the sun, to defeat the powers of darkness, to beget and redeem other souls. We have power over our own eternal destinies. Most of all, we have the potential to become beings of pure love, which is the ultimate inheritance of godly glory and power.

The greatest power we can know comes through Christ. It is in experiencing the mystery of his love through the atonement that we find hidden treasures of power. When we experience his love in the deepest recesses of our souls, we understand that we are powerful to love ourselves and others. Beyond this, we know we have the power to do all things that are good. It was this power that gave Nephi the confidence to return to Jerusalem and claim the brass plates; that gave him the courage to tell his older brothers if they touched him, they would wither; that gave him the faith to build a ship and set sail on uncharted waters. Like Paul, Nephi could have said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Paradoxically, we often must lose power in order to gain it. Religious history is replete with examples of people who acted with great power at the moment of their greatest sense of powerlessness. In the now famous account of Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, Parley P. Pratt tells how, after continuous abuse at the hands of his captors, Joseph rose to his feet and shouted with prophetic authority, "Silence, ye fiends of the infernal pit! In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die this instant!" Pratt describes that moment of transcendent powerfulness in eloquent and moving prose: "He ceased to speak. He stood in terrible majesty. Chained and without a weapon; calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards. . . .I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in magisterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath in the courts of England; I have

witnessed a Congress in solemn session to give laws to a nation; I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms; but dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon, in an obscure village in Missouri."[9]

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare gives the greatest dramatization in all of literature regarding the transformation that comes to the heart of a powerful person when he loses his power. Shakespeare aligns those who abuse power (Goneril, Regan, and Edmund) with those who have power taken from them or who willingly give it up for others (Cordelia, Gloucester, Kent, and Edgar). In the middle stands Lear. As king, Lear is the most powerful person in the play, but he begins losing his power when he uses it to manipulate his daughters into competing for the one power that cannot be wagered—love. Through the evil machinations of his two older daughters and his own moral blindness, Lear loses all he has—his crown, his retainers, his kingdom, and the companionship of the one daughter who honors him as king and father. Because of these losses, he also comes perilously close to losing his sanity.

Wandering the stormy heath, Lear encounters Edgar disguised as a naked fool and is made aware for the first time of his own previous indifference to poor, suffering humanity. Deprived of all the trappings of kingly power, he can at last empathize with those who are dispossessed. He says,

> Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
> too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose yourself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just.[10]

In other words, "As I look around and see these poor defenseless people, I realize that I have been too insensitive, too unaware of their wretched condition. Those of us who have been blessed to have so much should let our hard hearts be healed by such sights as these and in so doing share our bounty with these poor creatures so that God's concern for his children might be more evident than it now appears." Or as Alfred Harbage says, "The justice of heaven can only be revealed through the acts of men."[11]

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9. *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 229-30.
10. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, III.4.28-37.
11. Alfred Harbage, *William Shakespeare: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Octagon, 1971), 418.

This is the lesson of Christ's birth. Whereas Lear was forced to give up all earthly power before he could identify with suffering humanity, Christ chose to give up all heavenly power that he might feel what we feel. When he said to Samuel the Lamanite, "Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world" (3 Nephi 1:13), he was Jehovah. Light was his scepter, space his dominion, and earth his footstool. Within hours he had surrendered his divine dominion to become the most helpless of creatures, a baby cradled in a manger. This is the meaning of the condescension of God: that he would give away all power in order to understand the powerless, that he would descend below all things in order to help us rise above all things.

We take on Christ's power when we act as he would act in relation to other people, when we participate in the redemption of humankind by expressing to others in concrete ways the pure love of Christ. Elie Wiesel speaks of these encounters as "messianic moments." He says, "I believe today that it's possible for you or me or anyone to bring a moment, a messianic moment, to each other. . . .[By messianic moment] I mean to humanize destiny, to give that person. . .a different environment, a different way. . .of finding truth without cruelty, without pain."[12]

There are striking contemporary examples of people who, either deprived of worldly power or willingly surrendering it, have ministered in messianic ways. The most potent examples may be found in the lives of women, perhaps because as a group they have suffered powerlessness for centuries. All the individual women I have chosen as examples have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

For example, I think of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity who for decades have been angels of mercy to the dying, diseased, and abandoned on the streets of Calcutta. To the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, Sister Teresa added a fourth: "To give wholehearted, free service to the very poorest." These Missionaries of Charity have rescued tens of thousands of those Sister Teresa referred to as "the dying, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unwanted, the unloved. . .Jesus in disguise."[13] Before her death, Sister Teresa founded a home for the dying, an orphanage, a leper colony, and a home for the aged. She also organized missions similar to the one in Calcutta in a number of locations throughout the world. Emphasizing the source of her power, she said, "The more you have, the more you are occupied, the less you give. But the less you have, the more free you are. Poverty for us is freedom." When she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work, she gave all the money to build more homes for

12. "Facing Hate With Elie Wiesel and Bill Moyers," PBS, November 27, 1991. Transcript no. BMSP-19, available through Journal Graphics, Inc. 1535 Grant Street, Denver, CO 80203.

13. "A Pencil in the Hand of God" (an interview with Mother Teresa by Edward W. Desmond), *Time*, 4 December 1989, 11, 13.

the poor and destitute. Summarizing her philosophy, she said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."[14]

In this regard, a story of Moses is told in the Midrash. Long before he was the Father of Nations, Moses was a shepherd. Once when he was tending his father-in-law's flock, he noticed one of the lambs was missing. He searched a long time, and when he finally found it, it was drinking from a pool of water. Moses waited patiently until the lamb was finished drinking and then said tenderly, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You must be weary." He then carried the young sheep on his shoulders and returned it to the flock. When God witnessed Moses' mercy, God knew Moses would be kind to his people. Commenting on this story, Rabbi David Wolpe says, "How we treat the weak and needy is the measure of our heroism. For each of us, the question is not what dragons we have slain, but how we tend sheep."[15]

The Nobel Prize for Peace in 1978 went to two women from Northern Ireland, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams. Believing that "violence was not the way of Christ," these women faced the bloody conflict that divided their country for decades by organizing legions of women to march for peace throughout Ireland and England. The Community of Peace People movement was one of the forces that eventually brought peace to that divided country. In her Nobel acceptance speech, Williams stated, "We are deeply, passionately dedicated to the cause of non-violence. To those who say we are naive, utopian idealists, we say that we are the only realists, and that those who continue to support militarism in our time are supporting the progress toward total self-destruction of the human race."[16]

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese woman who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, is, like her sister prize winners, a woman of courage and vision. Representing a people who are among the poorest in the world, this Oxford-educated daughter of the former ruler of Burma has led protests against the repressive regime that holds her country in bondage. She has refused a life of freedom until all political prisoners in her country are released and until she is guaranteed the right to be a spokeswoman for her people. This one woman willing to surrender her own freedom for her people has demonstrated more courage than all the men in power in her country.[17]

There are also many ordinary women who make messianic moments possible for those in need. Most of these women are unknown and unheralded. In every community and congregation they work quietly to transform institutions to be more responsive to human needs; they organize groups to give service; they provide primary care to the disabled, the elderly, to those dying of AIDS, to

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14. Tyler Wasson, ed., Nobel Prize Winners (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1987), 1048.

15. *The Healer of Shattered Hearts* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 92-93.

16. Wasson, *Nobel Prize Winners*, 226.

17. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings* (New York: Viking, 1992).

the homeless, to abused children. They do Christ's work as he would do it without fanfare, without acknowledgment, without reward.

An example of such women is provided by the poor Christian women of El Salvador who, during the decades of violence and turbulence that wracked their country, worked to relieve suffering and to bring peace. These humble women, many of them Mothers of the Disappeared—meaning that their sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers had been killed by the military or the death squads—brought a new faith and hope to the people of El Salvador by making a covenant with Christ that they would minister to the needs of the poor, no matter the cost. These poor, uneducated women established what are called "base Christian communities" throughout their country to minister to those who were disenfranchised and dispossessed by a corrupt government.

Before the armistice was signed in 1992, politicians and soldiers wantonly murdered 75,000 people in El Salvador. In the face of this violence, these women who organized the *Iglesia Popular* (the Popular Church) created a powerful force among El Salvador's most powerless populations. Most gave up all they possessed in order to minister to the needs of the poor. As one of them said, "Our dream is to see the birth of a different kind of church, better yet, to recover the church of Jesus."[18]

The testimonies of these women were collected in a book entitled *The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women* by Renny Gordon. Their voices testify to the fact that one can become extremely powerful in the absence of all worldly power. Taking hope from the Spanish translation of the Bible authorized by the Second Vatican, these women began to change their religious expression. As one of those who started the base Christian community north of the Torola River in Morazan said of the Bible, "This book of God is subversive because it turns the tortilla over, because it throws down the order of kings and empires and it puts the poor on top. This book with its stories of liberation. . .taught us that we, the poor, are the preferred ones of God, that God wants the poor to stop being poor and that God calls us to work to change things."[19] These women administered to the sick and—defying the orders of the Catholic Church—even celebrated the Eucharist. As Ana, one of the most respected, said, "Yes, I celebrate Mass. We have brought a tortilla, blessed it and shared it with the people."[20]

While the military and the politicians continued to exercise power over the people of El Salvador, these women transformed the soul of their country, making God's love evident in spite of the secret murders of the death squads, the mass destruction of military bombings, and the silent acquiescence of the official church. As Renny Gordon says, "This is the epiphany, the moment when everything is turned on its head, when God is revealed anew—not the expected

18. Renny Gordon, ed., *The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: Salvadoran Women Speak* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 37.

19. Gordon, *Hour of the Poor*, 42.

20. Ibid., 55.

Father God, but a vulnerable, tenacious God broken and bloodied in Morazan, Cabanas, and Chalatenango, yet full of hope. What a surprise, an assault really, to discover that this God

> is not a Jesuit,
> not even educated,
> not ordained
> not inevitably a male militant,
> this God is not an individual,
> but a people,
> this pueblo who are
> peasants and workers,
> women and anonymous,
> who are mostly
> all there is of God.
> This obscure God who seeks
> solidarity,
> who makes everything
> new in history,
> everything possible.
> This god who announces
> the audacity of women.
> What a surprise!"[21]

These women understood better than the men in their country that the ultimate and most enduring power in this world is love. Love is the one word the scriptures most clearly equate with God. "God is love" is both a statement of fact and a promise. When all other powers have fallen away, vanished with the vanities of the world, love will remain. It alone is the power that will save the world, save us from ourselves, keep us from the ultimate power of darkness. As the black priest Misumangu says in Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, "There is only one thing that has power completely, and that is love. Because when a man loves, he seeks no power, and therefore he has power."[22]

I hasten to recognize, however, that those who are born without power and who endure powerlessness for most if not all of their lives, may not have the luxury of considering the theological and philosophical implications of losing power as I do. Perhaps many of them dream of getting power and using it against the powerful who have abused them. As Misumangu says, just before the passage quoted above,

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21. Ibid., 38.

22. *Cry, The Beloved Country: A Story of Comfort and Desolation* (London: Penguin, 1988), 37.

> Because the white man has power, we too want power, . . .but when a black man gets power, when he gets money, he is a great man if he is not corrupted. I have seen it often. He seeks power and money to put right what is wrong, and when he gets them, why, he enjoys the power and the money. Now he can gratify his lusts, now he can arrange ways to get white man's liquor, he can speak to thousands and hear them clap their hands. Some of us think when we have power, we shall revenge ourselves on the white man who has had power, and because our desire is corrupt, we are corrupted, and the power has no heart in it.[23]

Likewise, the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith in his great revelation on priesthood and power, "It is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (D&C 121:39). This revelation on power was given to Joseph Smith when he was in Liberty Jail, a period in which he experienced profound powerlessness.

When we are deprived of power or voluntarily give it up, we may begin to wonder if all transcendent power doesn't begin in powerlessness. As I have mentioned, it is significant that the most powerful person to walk the earth had his beginning as a helpless child. It is also significant that he who could command the elements, cast out demons, heal the sick, claim the ultimate victory over death, had no wealth, possessed no physical beauty (Isaiah 53:2 says he would "have no beauty that we should desire him"), governed no nation, commanded no army, held no position of worldly power. And yet so powerful is his life that ultimately it will affect every mortal for good.

Because Christ knew the power of love, he eschewed all other kinds of power. He demonstrated his greatest contempt for worldly power when Satan took him up to "an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" and offered Christ power and dominion over them if he would worship him, the god of earthly power (Matt. 4:8-9). Just as he had forsaken nourishment by refusing to use his power to turn stones into bread, and declined to demonstrate his divine power by refusing to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple, so Christ refused all the power the world offered. When he returns to reclaim this broken world, he will put an end to all the destructive kinds of power that have dominated history and which still dominate our present world. Paul says, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24).

Christ abandoned kingship to serve the poor and powerless, but found a greater power within himself by surrendering those things that are always hard to surrender—comfort, accolades, privilege, dominion, wealth. These are the

23. Ibid., 37.

things the self cries out for so loudly that it is hard to hear the cries of the forsaken, the homeless, the least among us. It may be that only when we are willing to give up all we desire so that others may be fed and clothed and nurtured, both physically and spiritually, that we can call ourselves true disciples of Christ.

Just as Christ came into mortality by giving up all his power, so at the moment of his death he surrendered all earthly power—even that power connected through friendship and fellowship with his most devout followers. At his darkest hour, even the heavens withdrew their power so that our Lord was completely alone when he performed the most powerful act in human history. Kneeling in Gethsemane and hanging on the cross, abandoned by his friends and disciples, in unspeakable agony, he took upon himself the sins and burdens of all humankind, from the beginning to the end of the world.

To become like Christ is to become one with the powerless, to minister to their needs, to lift their burdens, to speak peace to their hearts, and to help them in all ways to feel his power as the transcendent and transforming force in their lives.

What are the implications for Christ's church? Among other things, it means that those of us who are vested with priesthood power have a responsibility not to misuse or abuse that power. It means that we have a sacred obligation to bless and empower others. It means we must be spiritually open to the possibilities as to how God's power may be shared with all his children. It means that our hearts are broken for the broken-hearted, that we hunger to relieve the suffering of the hungry, and that we work to make the powerless powerful.

I am grateful for the events in my life which have reminded me of my obligation to use Christ's power as he would use it. I am grateful that giving up certain kinds of power has made me aware of those rarer more elusive powers which cleanse and enlarge the soul. I am grateful that in losing power, I have to some degree been able to identify more closely with the powerless, to empathize with the disenfranchised, the disabled, and the dispossessed. Most of all I am grateful that as a powerless ten-year-old boy I was blessed to find the restored gospel, to come to know Jesus Christ as my savior, and to have revealed to my soul that God loves me unconditionally. I now understand that my most important tasks in this life are to testify of Christ's love, to let his love shine through me, and to bless others with whatever love I am capable of giving.