BERNHARDT'S ETHICS OF RESPONSIBLE POWER: A REAFFIRMATION

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A deep and agonizing dilemma arises when the person of humane and pacific sentiment is confronted by the often conflicting demands of a Judaeo-Christian ethic of love and the reality of power. In a world in which power is most descriptive of the age, this dilemma arises with increasing frequency. John C. Bennett put the matter well:

> Today Christians and other morally sensitive citizens in the United States are in a peculiarly difficult position because of the concentrated responsibility that goes with its power. . .American citizens have concentrated responsibiilty. What they do or leave undone may have a direct effect on whether the world moves toward nuclear war or on whether it lays itself open to (totalitarian) pressures which might shift the balance of. . .power in favor of (totalitarianism). Their moral commitments and sensitivities are deeply involved on both sides of this terrible dilemma.[1]

The dilemma became an increasingly troublesome burden in my own life from my late teens until it was brought into a workable position through the experiences in attending the Iliff School of Theology and, especially, Prof. William H. Bernhardt's course "An Ethics of Responsible Power."

Clearly, two parallel and yet at times divergent influences were bringing this dilemma to the fore. The first was that of being reared in a home in which family members accepted military service as a part of their responsibilities as citizens. My father served with the American Expeditionary Force in France in World War I, and two brothers-in-law served in the Army and a brother in the Navy during World War II.

The second major influence was that of The Methodist Church, which traditionally has been strongly pacifistic. A vivid example of this came during a "Religious Emphasis Week" at Morningside College just a few days after I had been released from active duty with the Army in 1949. The speaker, a Methodist clergyman of national renown, said as forcefully as he could, "You can't put Christ in a uni-

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[1]John C. Bennett, "Ethics, the Bomb and Herman Kahn," *The Christian Century*, Mar. 28, 1962, p. 383.

form! And if you could, whose would you put him in?" The clear message being that the place of the Christian was not in military uniform. This was followed by criticisms and pressures from within the Church directed toward discouraging my continued involvement in the Army Reserve and my desire to return to active military service as a chaplain.

Along with the continued influence of the home and of the Church, two other experiences further personalized the love-power dilemma in my life. Following high school in 1948, having no vocationtal plans and facing possible induction into the Army for two years, I enlisted in the Army under a one-year program for 18-year-olds. On one occasion, during that year, another one-year-enlistee and I had been assigned as armed guards over a work detail of prisoners from the post stockade. Probably due to our obvious youthfulness and relative inexperience as soldiers, several of the prisoners began harassing and threatening us. First, just verbally and then more overtly until several of the prisoners began moving for us. My immediate response was to bolt a live round of ammunition into the chamber of my weapon and level it at the lead prisoner. This put a stop to the threats but the experience, and the thoughts of what else might have happened, for the first time seriously raised the dilemma in my mind.

The next pressing confrontation with the issue came in 1953 during the summer between college and enrolling at Iliff. I spent that time as a student officer at the Army's Artillery School at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. One block of the training involved learning the duties of a "forward observer," the artilleryman who seeks out enemy targets, radios their locations to the appropriate section so the guns can begin firing and corrects the firing as the shells begin bursting. The stark reality of the responsibility was made especially evident to me in the description of the "white phosophorous" shell, which not ony results in concussion and shrapnel but also burns fiercely as the white phosophorous adheres to human skin. And again, the dilemma between the ideals of the Christian ethic and the evident need for power in the defense of our country.

I was fortunate that those experiences were not pushed to their ultimate, that is, the final use of the power at my disposal was not called for. The question, however, became ever more pressing: What happens if the time comes when full use of such power is called for? It was in this frame of mind, then, that I encountered Bernhardt's "Ethics of Responsible Power."

There is always risk in attempting to interpret another's thoughts, however well we think we understand them. Indeed, there is an ele-

ment of unfairness when that interpretation is used to support or justify the interpreter's actions. The theme of this paper, therefore, is Bernhardt's "Ethics of Responsible Power" as I came to understand it and, as well, with what that ethics has come to mean to me through the modifications brought about by the experiences in the years since taking that course in 1955. Twenty of those years were spent as a chaplain in the Air Force.

In class, from time to time, Bernhardt cautioned us about quoting from him. Regarding this problem, he wrote:

> After teaching for more than a quarter of a century, I am painfully aware of the fact that words may be heard by students, and even written carefully in notebooks, but the meanings these words were designed to convey were often at best only imperfectly understood.[2]

Furthermore, his thinking developed and therefore changed to some extent. The following words from Gandhi express the image I have retained of Bernhardt's spirit:

> My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statement on a given question, but to be consistent with the truth at it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result is that I have grown from truth to truth.[3]

I emphasize, therefore, that this paper is not meant to imply that Bernhardt would necessarily agree with my interpretation of application of his ethics. I am confident, however, that he would respect the conclusions to which this struggle has led me to this point in time.

As I came to understand it, Bernhardt's Ethics of Responsible Power held that:

> Ethically inclined persons and groups must assume their place in the power structure of their day if they are to play a significant moral role. . .This is certainly true of international relations. It is no less true in economics, social relations, race relations, sex ethics and recreation. The ethical person is one who accepts his responsibilities with all that this entails, accepting both the dangers and the advantages which accrue.[4]

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[2]William H. Bernhardt, "Biblical and Theological Foundations for Social Ethics," Chicago: General Board of Social and Economic Relations of the Methodist Church, 1957, p. 3.

[3]Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (N.Y.: New American Library, 1954), p. 56.

[4]Bernhardt, "Closing Comments," mimeographed material for the course, "The Ethics of Responsible Power," Nov. 21, 1955.

Power, in whatever form, is a reality which no amount of wishing will make otherwise and if ethically inclined persons are unwilling to accept power, and the hard decisions that go with it, then persons who are not ethically inclined, a Stalin, Mussolini or Hitler, will accept that power and use it irresponsibly. "Power will be used, and it is the Christian's responsibiilty to see that it is used for good rather than evil."[5] Power will not long remain in a vacuum.

I

At the outset, I suggest that there are no absolutes to guide us in this dilemma.[5] Seldom will there be any easy or clear-cut answers in this dilemma.[6] Seldom will there be any easy or clear-cut answers in trying to relate the ideal of Christian love with the reality of power. It is rare, indeed it would be tempting to use the word "never," that the issues will be between a clear-cut right and a clear-cut wrong, or between good and evil or black and white. Rather, the situations usually lend themselves to a genuine moral complexity, where right and wrong, good and evil are exasperatingly intermingled, ethical distinctions are foggy, motives mixed and morality a shade of gray. It just will not do, as some have tried, to oversimplify the matter by contending that the choice is the way of Jesus or the way of atomic war, or in the more common vernacular, make love not war. If only those were the choices.

Clear illustration of this was pointed out by Lincoln during the American Civil War in his correspondence with the Quaker Mrs. Gurney:

> On principle and faith, Quakers are opposed to both war and oppression, but they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma some have chosen one horn and some the other.[7]

Or, more recently, the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the many German clergymen martyred by the Nazis. At the outset of the war, Bonhoeffer was a pacifist opposed to the use of force, to killing and to murder. But as the war continued and he became more aware of the total barbarity of the Hitler regime, Bonhoeffer joined in a con-

[5]Professor Bernhardt gave detailed attention to logical methods and presuppositions. On this particular point, see "Biblical and Theological Foundations for Social Ethics," pp. 20 ff.; *Protestantism and Power* (Denver: Taylor Library, Iliff School of Theology, 1957), pp. 60 ff.; *The Cognitive Quest for Good* (Denver: Criterion Press, 1971), esp. Ch. VI, "The Presupposition of Absolute Demand"; "History and the Logic of All or None," *The Iliff Review*, XX (Spring, 1963). 2. (Ed.)

[6]Bernhardt, "In Restrospect," *The Iliff Review*, XI (Spring, 1954). 2, p. 20.

[7]D. Elton Trueblood, *The People Called Quakers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 189.

spiracy to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer came to believe that killing one man, Hitler, would bring the war to a close and thus put an end to the killing of millions of persons. Was his decision the right one—was it the Christian choice under the circumstances?

> We clearly do not know what position Jesus would take in our complex modern world. We do not know whether Bonhoeffer, in his decision to try to kill Hitler, and thus avoid bloodshed on the part of millions, was following Christ or not. All that we know is that he "thought he was."[8]

Again, the choice was not between killing or not killing, but rather as to who would be killed, how many, by whom and for what reasons.

No single factor, however, has brought the matter into such bold reality as has the whole issue of the atomic bomb. In an indepth study of the development of the bomb, Robert C. Batchelder traces the bomb from the first pressures within the scientific community to the moral issues raised during the five years following the atomic bombings in 1945. He writes:

> If one were asked the question 'Shall we make an instrument which can destroy a whole city and wipe out tens of thousands of lives in an instance?' one's response would be an emphatic 'No!' Yet conscientious and humanitarian scientists persuaded the United States government, in time of peace, to undertake a full-scale attempt to make such an instrument.[9]

It was, as Batchelder titled chapter two in his book, "The Campaign of the Exiled Scientists." Men who had been driven from their scientific and academic positions, from their homes and from their country, fleeing for their very lives from the threats of the regimes of Hitler or Mussolini. Among them were Max Born, James Franck, Edward Teller, Leo Szilard, Enrico Fermi and Albert Einstein. These were men of superior scientific ability but they were also men of the highest humanitarian sentiments. They all had experienced first-hand the inhuman barbarism of their totalitarian homelands and knowing that some Nazi scientists were working on the problem of atomic energy they shuddered to think of what would happen if Hitler got the bomb first. Such an event, they were sure, would give Hitler the world.

The scientists developed the bomb, not because of any desire for such a weapon, but because they were deathly afraid of what could

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

[9] Robert C. Batchelder, *The Irreversible Decision:* 1939-1950 (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 9.

happen to the civilized world if Hitler were to get such overwhelming power. The historical evidence is such as convincingly to suggest that Hitler would have used the bomb to further his ambition of world conquest. So, then, the question was not whether the bomb should be developed but rather who would be the first to do so and for what ends.

This is to say, then:

> There is, in every situation a real right, but people who live in the finite predicament can never know absolutely, what that real right is. All that we can do is to try, and to be tender in our judgment of others whose decisions are not identical to our own.[10]

There are no absolutes to guide us in this ethic.

II

The nearest thing to an absolute is brought out by Bernhardt himself:

> The second consideration basic to the development of an ethic of responsible power is what has been called "reverence for life." Our ultimate concern, ethically, is the conservation and enhancement of life.[11]

The obvious problem even here, though, is that many of the circumstances which demand our choices are such that we cannot always be sure which choice will most enhance or conserve life.

One of the persons most noted for a non-violent approach to life in the Twentieth Century was Mahatma Gandhi. But even this staunch advocate of passive resistance to evil accepted the fact that there were times when more direct forms of power were called for. During World War I, Gandhi raised an Ambulance Corps of Indian students to serve the British Army and later he urged Indians to enlist in the Army. In later years he said of those actions:

> I discovered that the British Empire had certain ideals with which I have fallen in love, and one of those ideals is that every subject of the British Empire has the freest scope possible for his energy and honor. . .If the Empire perishes (in the war), with it perish our cherished aspirations.[12]

Gandhi's involvement in war was modified somewhat in the years leading to World War II. I have found, however, no evidence that he

[10]Trueblood, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
[11]Bernhardt, "Christian Ethics in the Atomic Age," *The Army and Navy Chaplain*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, July-Aug., 1946, p. 5.
[12]Fischer, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 f.

ever apologized for his earlier stand or that he ever criticized those who fought in defense of the Empire and the "cherished aspirations" of human rights, which rights were very much threatened with extinction by the Axis armies.[13]

The extent of the dangers to "reverence for life" posed by Hitler is graphically and tragically portrayed in the volumes of evidence on the Nazi concentration camps. The world will never know the exact number of persons who suffered and died in those camps, but the inhumanities perpetuated therein are beyond comprehension. Nazi-Hunter Simon Wiesenthal, who survived the horrors of twelve of the camps and is probably as near an expert on the subject as anyone could be, writes that eleven million people, including six million Jews, perished in the camps.[14] In a television interview, Wiesenthal pointed out that the eleven million figure did not include military prisoners of war who died there.[15] It is estimated, for example, that at least two million Russian POWs were killed in the camps and another one million probably were since they have never been accounted for.[16]

One of the most agonizing experiences I have ever had was a visit to the site of one of those camps—Dachau, a few kilometers northeast of Munich, West Germany. A Dutch survivor of Dachau, writing in a brochure which was on sale there, said that the camp site serves as a memorial to all who suffered and died there but also "as a warning to coming generations of man's latent inhumanity towards man."[17] He said he did not want revenge but rather: "The message of the former inmates of the concentration camp Dachau can. . .be condensed into three words: Practice more humanity."[18]

Several times in my reading I have come across statements which viewed the concentration camps and the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima as comparable examples of the worst of man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Both brought extreme suffering to many people, though in terms of numbers they are hardly comparable. But there is really no rational comparison. Dachau, the first such camp, was built in 1933, six years before the war began. Even during the war the camps were of no military necessity. They were cold-blooded, programmed inhumanity to man. They were set up to exterminate

[13]See Fischer's further comments on this. *ibid.*, pp. 132 f.

[14]Simon Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 174. 314.

[15]Wiesenthal interviewed by Dan Rather on CBS "Who's Who," June 19, 1977.

[16]William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1962), p. 401 and *passim.*

[17]Nico Rost. *Concentrations Camp-Dachau* (Brussells: Comite International de Dachau, n.d.), p. 3.

[18]*Ibid.*

Jews, to brutalize conquered peoples and to deal with Germans who opposed the Nazi regime. German author Heinrich Mann, writing of the camp victims, put the matter quite clearly: "None of them died justly. The welfare of the human race or our own personal well being demanded neither the starving to death of fellow human beings or their shootings."[19]

The decision to drop the atomic bombs, on the other hand, was considered by President Truman, and many of his advisors, as a military measure which they hoped would bring the war to a quicker end. One of those involved in the decision to use the bombs, Henry L. Stimson, said that looking back over his five years as the secretary of war:

> I see too many stern and heart-rending decisions to pretend that war is anything else than what it is. The face of war is the face of death; death is an inevitable part of every order a wartime leader gives. The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision which brought death to over a hundred thousand Japanese. No explanation can change the fact and I do not wish to gloss over it. But this deliberate premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent choice. . .It put an end to the war. It stopped the fire raids, the strangling blockade and the ghastly spector of a clash of great land armies (in anticipation of an Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands.)[20]

The concentration camps were programmed inhumanity—the bombs were military weapons of responsible power intended to put an end to the irresponsible powers which brought the camps and the war into being in the first place. This is to say that:

> The best decision, in practice, is not the abstract best but is always the best under the circumstances. . .(It is right if) any conceivable alternative would be worse in terms of human consequences and suffering, which are the only terms on which it is reasonable to argue.[21]

So, while there is no absolute to guide us in this ethic, there is a clear point of reference to which we can turn in our decision making and that is "reverence for life."

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[19]Rost, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[20]Batchelder, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
[21]Trueblood, *op. cit.*, pp. 199 & 204. (It may be well to recall that many ethicists regard the rationale used to justify the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima as not applicable to the use of it on Nagasaki three days later. Ed.)

III[22]

Professor Bernhardt was fond of Schweitzer's term, "reverence for life," as a way of indicating on the one hand that ethical thought requires norms and purposes, and on the other hand, that the good must be thought of as a cluster of purposes and values, although his use of the term was in a philosophical context quite different from Schweitzer's.

> The second consideration basic to the development of an ethic of responsible power is what has been called "reverence for life." Our ultimate concern, ethically, is the conservation and enhancement of life.[23]

It may be useful at this point to state some additional views in this ethics, since the present generation of students may not be familiar with it. Bernhardt belongs in the utilitarian school of ethics. He placed great stress on "effectiveness" of means and consequences of action, because at that time it seemed to him that that was what was neglected or lost in sentimentalism. Thus he frequently used the phrase "the art of the possible," as applicable to ethics – especially social ethics – as well as politics.[24] And he stressed the necessity of using effective forms of power, because so much of Christian ethics had denegrated power, giving emphasis to motives and being indifferent as to results.

> An ethic which is to be adequate in our larger affairs must be an ethic of responsible power. We are duty bound to see that we do as little injustice as is humanly possible, that we use our position, prestige, and power to see that justice obtains wherever we have any capacity to produce effects. And when we do so, we are conforming to the will of God as fully as when we exercise love in those situations where it is relevant.[25]

Those words were written in 1957, but the basic view was developed years before. They combine something of Reinhold Niebuhr's recognition of the importance of power in social affairs and Richard Niebuhr's emphasis upon "responsibility." Sherman M. Stanage gave

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[22]Section III of this paper was inserted by the editor, with permission of the author, to provide some additional exposition of Bernhardt's ethics, and in part as a tribute to an honored teacher, in which the author and editor share. That they do so from somewhat different ethical perspectives is itself a tribute to William Bernhardt's contribution to his students.

[23]Bernhardt, "Christian Ethics in the Atomic Age," p. 5. The first consideration was that God be understood in terms of power as well as love; the third was "positive universalism," including "all life." P. 6.

[24]This emphasis runs throughout *Protestantism and Power.*

[25]"Biblical and Theological Foundations for Social Ethics," p. 26.

an excellent survey of Bernhardt's ethics three years earlier, which indicated the development of Bernhardt's thought.[26] As regards consequences, Bernhardt wrote: "The final test of a given proposal is always to be found in the effectiveness with which it helps us to resolve the difficulty before us."[27] But the ethical dimension must enquire into the goals and values for which a given strategy is effective. "The difficult task [is that] of determining the norms or standards in terms of which their efficiency or effectiveness is to be judged."[28]

The purpose which ought to be served by social instruments and programs is justice. "Perhaps justice in the areas of social ethics is as moral at the institutional level as love is at the face-to-face interpersonal level."[29] "When we are viewing the institutional area of human affairs, we must say, 'Where justice is, there God is.' "[30]

The sort of justice he had in mind was defined in terms of human welfare, understanding welfare in the sense of *well being* and enrichment of life circumstances, opportunity and fulfillment. "Justice means thought and action which is congruent with and contributory to the ends of human welfare.[31]

Perhaps because he stressed effectiveness so much, some students failed to notice the extent to which Bernhardt insisted upon humane norms as being the goal which effective means must serve to be ethical.

> The mere checking of further aggression will not solve the larger problems. Justice requires that human welfare be extended to all people. . .The long-range program includes that of helping the great underprivileged masses in many parts of the world to share more widely in what some of us take for granted. This includes better health, proper food, education and the other ingredients of humane living. This long-range program must be undertaken for many reasons. The primary one is the Christian belief in the freedom and dignity of man.[32]

Again, noting the date (1957), the passage has a contemporary ring, except that it might now be stated in terms of the freedom and dignity of the human person. The lectures concluded with these words: "That ethic must be one of power, of effective action controlled by the responsibilities which justice imposes upon all men of goodwill."[33]

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[26]"Bernhardt's Ethical Theory," *The Iliff Review*, XI (Winter, 1954), 1.
[27]"Biblical and Theological Foundations," 3.
[28]*Ibid.*, 2.
[29]*Ibid.*, 17.
[30]*Ibid.*, 26.
[31]*Ibid.*, 23.
[32]"Protestantism and Power," p. 131.
[33]*Ibid.*, 136.

It should be noted that his use of the term "power" did not mean merely physical force, although, of course, it included that, but it meant more broadly capacity for realization of ends, which must be understood to include intelligence and skill and the many forms of human effort and organization that go into achievement of desired consequences. And, as has been said, this is within the scope of the possible: "The responsibility accepted must be commensurate with the status and powers of the persons and groups involved."[34]

It should be noted further that "welfare" is to be understood broadly and qualitatively, although it obviously must include food and other physical necessities. "Welfare consists in life-mantenance, life-perpetuation, and life-enhancement." And that is to be "enhancement to the highest degree consistent with our possibilities as persons and the potentialities in our several environments."[35] He understood even "life-maintenance" as meaning "more than mere persistence. It means living at levels which are consistent with common decency."[36] "Sub-normal living may result from malnutrition due to ignorance as well as inadequate income. It may result from the tensions produced by personal conflicts as well as from those in economic, social and international situations."[37] This theme, spelling out the full and rich meaning of welfare, as he meant the term, was dealt with at some length.

IV

Finally, an ethics of responsible power accepts the premise, stated so well by the contemporary novelist Arthur Hailey, that:

> If you seek to do positive things, achieve something, leave the world a mite better than you found it, then you must choose power and throw some of your purity away. There's no other choice.[38]

The great forward steps in human history have come, not by way of those who have stood off in splendid and sterile detachment from the world, but by way of those who have had the courage and the will to make the hard decisions thrust upon them by their willing acceptance of power. It is a Lincoln accepting the responsibiilties for decisions involving the dilemma of oppression or war. It is a Truman accepting the responsibilities brought about by the atomic bomb.

In his monumental study of the Third Reich, William L. Shirer

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[34]*Ibid.*, 6.
[35]*Biblical and Theological Foundations,* 22.
[36]*Protestantism and Power,* 105.
[37]*Ibid.*, 106.
[38]Arthur Hailey, *In High Places* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 232.

has pointed out that from the post-war evidence one can make a rather strong case for the thesis that had the Allied Forces been willing to use their power to check Hitler's earliest aggressions, he might have been toppled from power and World War II thus averted. In 1936, Hitler retook the Rhineland with but four brigades of troops while the French had at least 100 divisions facing the Germans. Hitler and members of his General Staff admitted that had the French acted, the Germans would have been forced to withdraw.[39] Shirer points out that this was hardly less true when Hitler ordered the take-over of Austria, the Sudetenland—Czechoslovakia and Poland. By default, then, Hitler got what he wanted and was thus further encouraged in his ruthless, irresponsible use of power until there was no way out for the Allies but capitulation or full-scale war.

Gandhi saw this problem clearly in his choice of methods of protest: "I fasted to reform those who loved me, you cannot fast against a tyrant for the tyrant is incapable of love, therefore inaccessable to a weapon like fasting."[40] Gandhi could urge his followers to lie down on the tracks to block streetcars in the knowledge that the British motormen would not run over them. But such tactics against a Hitler or a Stalin would probably have cost the demonstrators their lives in prison, if not on the tracks. Indeed, a sociologist studying the German Catholic Church experience in the Nazi era, concluded that one person whom he interviewed:

> may be the only German Catholic 'conscientious objector' to Hitler's wars to live to tell the tale, having been spared the customary death sentence by a commitment to a military mental hospital.[41]

The price of resistance, passive or otherwise, was almost always death.

This means, then, coming to grips with the realization that we must at times:

> ...(tone) down our ideal so that we may make it march and conquer in a stubborn world that is not yet ready for the perfect thing to which our inmost soul is consecrated.[42]

It is accepting the good we can, however limited, rather than none at all in the hope that by so doing the greater good will be served in the long run. Prior to America's entry into World War II there had been

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[39]Shirer, *op. cit.*, p. 401n.
[40]Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
[41]Gordon Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1962), p. 147.
[42]Rufus Jones, in *Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time,* Harry Emerson Fosdick, ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 210-211.

considerable debate over the rights and wrongs involved in the decision to come to the aid of England against the Nazi. One religious historian said of that debate:

> (We are) talking about straining out a British gnat and swallowing a Nazi camel. To be sure, the war might not establish a just and enduring peace—but it would restrain an outrageous villainy and give us a chance to build again...A victory by the Allies would insure none of the ideal ends which Christians entertained but a victory by the Axis would preclude them. And an Axis victory could be prevented only by military strength...To talk of influencing history by bearing the cross (of non-resistance) was to forget that the crucified (Christ) is blotted out in the historical process.[43]

In essence, then, these were times when going to war and using the bomb were the lesser of the evils confronting the nation's decision makers, remembering that the choices at the time were not between peace and war or non-violence and violence but rather between what kind of war and violence and for what ends. Of this, one theologian has said so well: "... best possible action does not involve us in sin. It involves us in evil, but so long as any other course of action would have resulted in greater evil..." then, at that moment, under those circumstances, the action was right.[44]

The choices which the humane and pacific person is called upon to make will seldom, if ever, be crystal clear but the ethics of responsible power calls upon that person to become, as it were, an anguished participant, after the fashion of Lincoln: "...an anguished soul endeavoring to bring itself into closer communion with its Maker and trying to understand his purpose amid the fury of the storm."[45]

CONCLUSION

No single factor so clearly spells out the tenor of the age than that of power. Yet, in the minds of the humane, power often remains an evil or an element best avoided. The time has come, however, if ever there was a time when this were not so, when the luxury of evading the responsibility for power can no longer be afforded. The person who would seek to live morally, humanely and justly, must enter into the whole of life, accept power as it is thrust upon him and attempt to

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[43]Roland H. Bainton, in *God and the H-Bomb,* Donald Keys, ed., (New York: Bellmeadows Press, 1961), p. 31.

[44]Harvey Seifert, in *God and the H-Bomb, op. cit.,* p. 117.

[45]Victor Searcher, *The Farewell to Lincoln* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 232.

sort out the best decision under the circumstances. The responsible person must hold with fierce tenacity to the reference point of "reverence for life" while making the often anguishing and uncertain decisions relating to the use of power.

The summation of the matter is brought out by an incident which was reported to have taken place during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Italian soldiers digging a trench unearthed a stone monument, thought to be at least 2,000 years old, on which was inscribed the following:

> Here am I, the captain of a legion of Rome who serves in the desert of Libya and learns and ponders this truth: that there are in life but two things, love and power, and no man has both.[46]

But, as the author who related the story continued, ". . .the inscription was wrong. No man dare have less than both."[47] Because inevitably love without power becomes a victim of the forces of inhumanity and power without love becomes reckless, abusive and inhumane. Power at its best is love carrying out the demands of justice.

A former combat infantryman, later turned clergyman, brings the matter back to where we began:

> In this latter-day world every responsible person—those who rushed to judgments and those who hesitated to act on any judgments—faced the same question: how do persons act sensibly in an apparently senseless world, how act rationally in an incomprehensible era, how act morally in demonic conflicts? Those are the questions of conscience in our history.[48]

For me, Bernhardt's Ethics of Responsible Power continues to point the way in the day-by-day quest of this one "anguished participant" trying to struggle through the dilemma that goes with attempting to choose the good from the bad in life. It is in the firm conviction that this is one of the principal roads which leads to the age-old hope voiced so eloquently by the prophet Isaiah that one day:

> Nations. . . shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.[49]

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[46]Daniel E. Taylor, in *God and the H-Bomb, op. cit.,* p. 204.
[47] *Ibid.,* p. 222.
[48]Roger I. Shinn, *Wars and Rumors of Wars* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 192.
[49]Isaiah 2:4 (RSV).