

Working With Praying Hands: Our Calling

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Kristen Johnson Ingram has written a book entitled, *With the Huckleberry Christ: A Spiritual Journey*.¹ This grandmother of six, who lives and writes in Springfield, Oregon, has described her spiritual journey as a struggle between her Mary and Martha selves.

I believe that the Gospel writer, Luke, knew this tension well as he told the story of Mary's and Martha's focused concerns during one of Jesus' visits to their home in Bethany (Luke 10:38-42). Luke, cleverly, surrounds the tension of this story with two other events in the life of Christ. Before the telling of the Mary-Martha story there are the questions of the lawyer to Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he asked, followed by the question, "Who is my neighbor?" These are requests of what is enduring, and to whom does one show charity.

Following the encounter with the lawyer comes the story of Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha, with the busy preoccupation of Martha, and the listening attentiveness at the feet of Jesus of the other sister.

Finally, Luke tells the story of the request of the Twelve to Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray . . ."

The sequence of these three stories, I believe, is not accidental, for between the stories of the Good Samaritan, prompted by the request of the lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" and the request of the Twelve, "Lord teach us to pray," lies the story of Mary and Martha which both illustrates and illuminates these two requests.

We see in these two sisters of Bethany our quest for a deep integrating Center for our many busy activities. One sister honors Jesus with her dishes, while the other honors him by sitting at his feet—the attitude of a student, attentive to a teacher. This becomes our dilemma. Are we to be primarily

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activists for the Kingdom? Is this what Jesus wants? Or, are we to become primarily prayers and students of the Kingdom? Mary models our deep contemplative Center; Martha is that self that seeks to honor Jesus with our busy activities.

Kristen Ingram tells of her own struggle with these two sisters in these words:

On my way home from shopping, Jesus whispered to me that the supreme joke in all this Mary/Martha dilemma is that Martha is still dominating my life no matter how creative I become, because Mary would never write a book, any book, no matter how mystical it was. My cook, my housekeeper, is Martha (and I always visualize that part of myself waddling around among the convolutions of my brain, like a self-important goose in a ruffled dusting cap); and now I know that so is the self who sits in front of the word processor writing this book.

“But who is Mary, then? I plead.

“She’s that foolish woman who keeps a goat in her backyard for no reason, and makes nonsense sounds as her grandson climbs al over her,” Jesus reminded me. “Mary is forever receiving, forever listening.”²

That is the tension we also experience as we desperately seek to know that Deep Center of our lives where we can integrate all the other dimensions of our lives, including our busy ministries on campus.

Those spiritualities that seek to denigrate the body (“flesh”) and substitute a docetic spirituality that denies one’s humanity and work have to be suspect. And there are plenty of them around whose object is to make us “spiritual” by denial of the non-spiritual!

Neither is a gnostic spirituality the answer to our dilemma. This ancient spiritual tradition that continually reappears from time to time emphasizes the need to escape the human and the material, primarily through a process of special knowledge available only to a privileged few.

Instead, what we seek is a route that is in touch with our total personhood—all the dimension of our many selves—and one that can be incarnated in daily living around the Deepest Center of our being. We seek a daily lived spirituality that knows God’s Presence in the issues of daily living. How shall we

go about this?

First we must seek that Deepest Center in our own lives. Authentic spirituality must begin as each one seeks that Deep Mary-Center that can more adequately express life at its deepest dimensions. This means seeking the transcendent dimension of life as the integration center for the other dimensions of life, not denying or escaping the vital-functional-historical-cultural dimensions.³

Then, we seek to incarnate our deepest understandings in the living and work structures of life. For example, the last decade has seen intense debate about the role of religion in education. Baptist colleges have not been immune to this discussion. It has centered around the question: "What makes a Christian college?" Certainly mandatory chapel and a Bible department do not a Christian college make! There is something more, in which the relationship of the transcendent dimension to business, accounting, English literature, Western civilization, physics, biology and law takes its place in the classroom. But how many professors, administrators and trustees understand this and have the skills and desire to implement this? It is much easier to toss the sop of mandatory chapel and a required religion course, even if it is comparative religion, to the constituency who support these schools and say we have a "Baptist-Christian College"! Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about a fundamentalist solution of requiring everyone to think alike on religion, where only a rigid formula of doctrines is taught and adhered to, as in the creationist approach to science.⁴

What I am speaking about is bringing the deepest dimension of human personality, that transcendent center, into dialogue with the vital-functional-historical-cultural dimensions of life. Is it possible, for instance, to teach business majors how to control the "bottom line" without bringing into play the transcendent dimension of human personality? Is it possible to teach biomedical subjects without teaching about the deepest dimension of human personality, being made in the image and likeness of God, a transcendent being? And is "justice," the starting point of ethics as in Kohlberg, or is there a higher departure point, the "love and forgiveness" of Jesus?

It is interesting to note that in the next quadrennial meeting of students at Urbana, Illinois, sponsored by Intervarsity Christian Fellowship—Urbana '87—the focus will not be (as it has

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been in the past) on speaking to college students about foreign missions. Intervarsity found out in a survey of the last group attending Urbana that three-fourths of the group were headed for the business world! What they were looking for was a word for them as "Monday-morning ministers," "marketplace ministers," "missionaries to the financial and business institutions of this nation and world." Tony Campollo and his colleagues at Eastern Baptist College have been seeking this for some years in their MBA program. They have sought to live with the issues of the Third World and from their encounter with the Bible to theologize about the incarnational, Christian aspects of life in the business communities there.

What I'm saying is that your job on campuses is to help bring about an integration at a deeper level of what it means to walk as a follower of the Nazarene. This is no mere vitalistic religion of "feel-good-ism;" nor a religion of functionalistic "activism" or human fulfillment; nor simply a religion of knee-jerk response to the most current historical/cultural pulsation, be it Christian rock or nuclear Chernobyls.

This not only will call us back to our basic calling but may provide the hope that will give shape to our future work. Still, it will be painful for all of us as we give up old, comfortable wineskins of our work to allow the new wineskins to emerge.

One way to describe what occurs in campus ministry today is to state it in terms of models of campus ministry student work. Grouped around four continuums—eight polarities—it might look something like this:

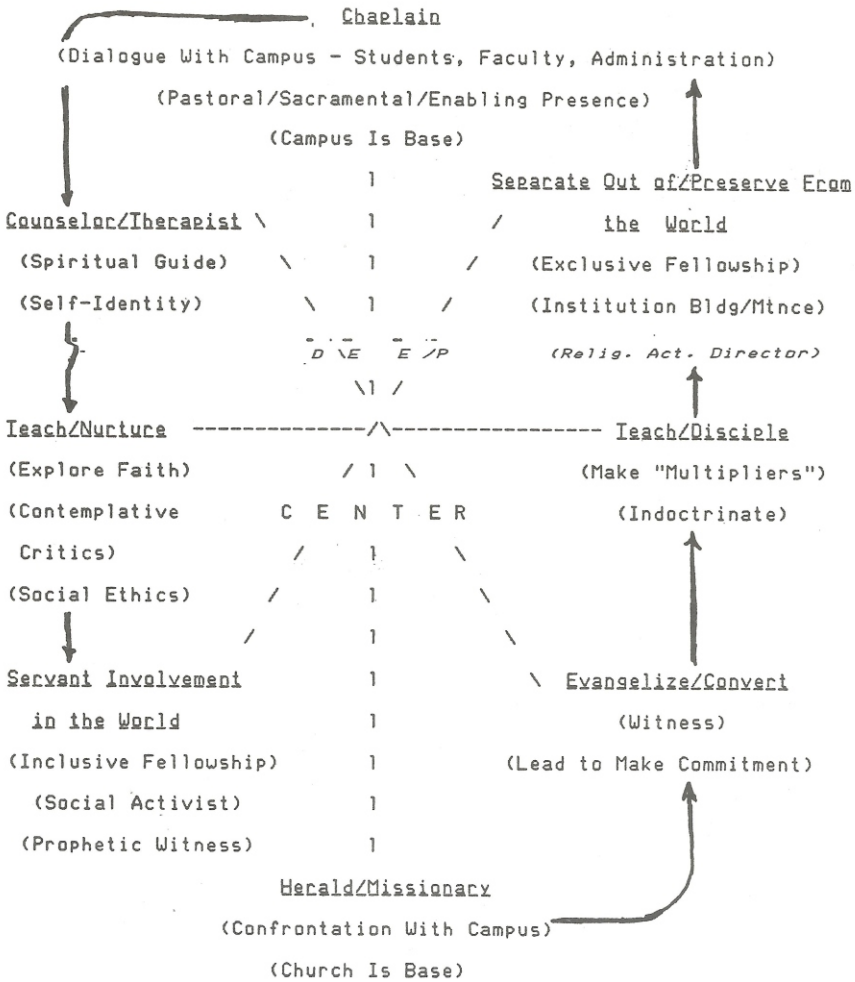
(See Graph 1)

GRAPH 1

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MODELS OF CAMPUS MINISTRY

Clemmons



There is a pluralism of styles of campus ministry active among Southern Baptists today. One will find him/herself primarily tending toward one or the other ends of the four continuums. Each of the continuums are stated in terms of polarities:

1. *Relationship to the Campus; Chaplain OR Herald-Missionary*: The concern here is whether the religious presence on campus is one of a pastoral/sacramental nature, or one of a confrontational nature. How one presents the *kerygma* is the issue. Is it done in the manner of confrontation, or in the manner of "being available"? On the one hand a person seeks simply to be a "sign of hope" on campus, while on the other hand one seeks to make known the signs of the Kingdom by overt means of preaching, one-on-one witnessing, or revivalistic crusades. An attitude that underlies this approach is whether one sees the educational pursuit of the university or college as a hostile or friendly environment. Does one need to challenge/change/convert that educational environment, or be the religious dimension within it?

2. *Relationship to Persons; Counselor OR Evangelist*: How one primarily relates to persons (students, faculty and administration) on the campus is also seen in terms of polarities. Does one relate as a counselor/therapist (or spiritual guide) or as an evangelist seeking the conversion of each person s/he meets? As a counselor, one may tend to see all persons in need of either therapy or spiritual guidance and bring the skills of pastoral care or spiritual direction to the job. As an evangelist one will seek the skills of presenting the Gospel claims on a person's life and leading that one to make a profession of faith. What one thinks persons basically need on the campus will determine how s/he relates to them and the vocational skills one seeks to bring to that task.

3. *Christian Growth Relationship; Nurture OR Disciple*: What is needed to enable personal growth is the focus of these polarities. On the one hand, what is needed is found in exploring faith stances, in growing "contemplative critics," and in exploring various ethical issues in society. On the other hand, what is needed is seen in learning the important doctrinal stances of Christianity, a Bible study that uncovers "principles" that can guide life, and a discipleship approach that seeks to allow the student to become a witness, a "multiplier of the faith."

4. *Relationship to the World; Separate From OR Serve:* The concern here is how one relates to the world. Is it primarily one of rescuing students from the world, building fellowships that will preserve students from the world? If so, the tendency is to build institutions that separate students from the contamination of the world, creating all sorts of religious activities, so that much of one's time is spent creating, administering and promoting those religious activities programs. Or, one is more concerned with a servant, prophetic posture toward the world and spends most of the organizing and activist energies directed toward all sorts of social service and prophetic activities on and off campus. One seeks to enable a fellowship of students, faculty and administration that includes the widest number of persons.

Avery Dulles, who wrote of the models of church, using much of the same approach as I have used here, concludes his study by saying that though persons are "drawn spontaneously toward certain models" more than others and that models help the church to adjust to each age "so as to operate more effectively in the social environment in which it finds itself", elements taken in isolation "could lead to serious imbalances and distortions".⁵

I think the same thing could be said about campus ministry. Your preference, personal convictions and style of campus ministry may lead you to select one end of the continuum more than the other and thus even to find that all of your preferences cluster on one side of the diagram. I would affirm the necessity for everyone to explore both ends of the four continuums in order to find a more integrating focus. In other words, it will be necessary to deal with all four continuums in their polarities for an wholistic model of student ministry to emerge. You cannot leave out any one of the poles of the continuum for a wholistic ministry to the campus.

But my primary concern in this paper is: What integrates it all? That is the focus of this meeting: your common calling. I now want to explore that integration under the heading of a return to the Deep Center, the priority of the Mary-Center. It is also a way of knowing the integration of the eight polarities of involvement in student ministry I described above, the Martha-involvements.

A RETURN TO THE DEEP CENTER

It is reported that Karl Barth said that "when people come to us, they do not really want to learn more about *living*. They want to learn more about what is on the farther edge of living—God."⁶ Calling, vocation, *vocare* (Ltn), *kalein* (Gk), *gara'* (Heb) all have to do with a summons, a bidding, an invitation. Supposedly, in the case of its Judeo-Christian usage, it is a summons from God. As such, it carries with it an obligation to undertake some particular task or duties. Thus, a divine calling to serve others, as in a religious calling, in the past meant that one was summoned to act on behalf of God. This peculiarly religious usage soon was appropriated by certain occupations to ennoble them, so that medical, legal, financial and governmental jobs came to be called "vocations."

Today, "vocational guidance" is far removed from that lofty vision of daily work as being a summons from God and has nothing more to do with the religious roots of the word. It simply implies a process of helping youth and young adults choose the jobs they are best suited for in life. Thus one may have a "vocational dilemma" today which has nothing to do with its religious connection.

So to talk about "The Hope of Our Calling" we too have to ask the basic question about our own understanding of calling. True, we have at least retained parts of the connection between what we do as a job and its being a "summons from God." But have we lost something in the process, forgetting that what we do on campuses is not just a job but a summons from God?

Like Martha's we are "so preoccupied, fretting and disturbed about many things" that we have lost the Mary-Center that calls us back to that original summons from God that allows each thing that we do to be a renewed summons from God integrated around a Deep Center.

All of us have work to be done here. Some of us have been so far away from the deep, transcendent center of our being, which the theologians speak of as being "made in the image and likeness of God," that we have allowed other "centers" to claim us. Even religious activity has become just another thing to do.

Others of us have known that Deep Center in times past and have had occasion to do some deepening work there, but either other preoccupations have pulled us away or we have met the

first obstacles of a deeper walk and found it was too painful, too costly, not current enough, and we abandoned that first work done.

There are some among us who, having found that Deep Center around which all of life must be integrated, have done some preliminary work in this area, and are ready to push on deeper.

Wherever you find yourself among these statements, or even outside and burned out, the work of deep integration at the Center is our first work in our hope and calling. That Center is what can provide a deeper and more lasting integration of our lives than what is there now. Busy Marths's, who know the center of sitting and listening as Mary's, will find that Deep Center the place of integrating the four continuums of ministry on campus.

For most of us the work of returning to the Deep Center can provide a more satisfying integration of all the other dimensions of our lives, including a way of working with the polarities of campus ministry.

Basil Pennington writes that the basic call is a call "to intimacy with God". He continues:

This is the fundamental call, the common call of all Christians. All other calls are in reference to it, particular way in which to respond to it. But, alas, *the fascination of trifles obscures the good. Few are chosen* because few choose to hear the call and heed it. But even among those who do hear, the call is often muffled. We are too busy listening to other things. And even when we do turn to listen, we have allowed so much of the cacophony of a disordered response to creation into our hearts that the din is almost insurmountable. We need to incorporate into our lives the ancient Christian practice of *lectin divina*. Although the words would be literally translated "divine reading," they might be more aptly expressed as listening to the Divine.⁷

The return to the Deep Center, for which listening is key, is also a process of "discovering our own centre." John Main, former abbot of the Benedictine Priory of Montreal, says this is "the first task and the first responsibility of every life that is to become fully human." He continues:

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The truly spiritual man or woman is one who is in harmony, one who has discovered that harmony within themselves and *lives* this harmony with creation and with God . . . Talking about prayer or about meditation or talking about God serves only one purpose—not to teach us anything “new” but to reveal to us what is present, what is actual, what is real.⁸

To be in the Deep Center is to be at “the point where God and the soul touch,” says Louis Dupre’, professor of philosophy of religion at Yale University. This metaphor, says Dupre’, suggests a “dwelling place where God resides, the center of my created being which remains permanently united with God’s creative act.”⁹ Dupre’ describes this deepest nature of persons in this way:

. . . the Christian mystic teaches an important lesson about the self, namely, that self is in its deepest nature more than itself. To move into myself means in the end to move beyond myself into what is “higher” than the self or “deeper” than the self. The mystic knows all the time that man is that particular being that is *more than man*. In the language age of modern philosophy, the person is a self-transcending being, yet not merely, or even mainly, through what he *does* but through what he *is* in his very nature. Precisely because God dwells first and foremost in the self, the mystical journey is mostly an inward journey.¹⁰

Thomas Merton, that Trappist monk of Kentucky, who died on the same day as Karl Barth, calls the return to the Deep Center a contemplative call. He says:

Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him Who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His. But we are words that are meant to respond to Him, to answer to Him, to echo Him, and even in some way to contain Him and signify Him. Contemplation is this echo. It is a deep resonance in the inmost center of our spirit in which our very life loses its separate voice and re-sounds with the majesty and the mercy of the Hidden and Living One. He answers Himself in us and this answer is divine life, divine creativity, making all things new. We ourselves become His echo and His answer. It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation He answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and answer.¹¹

For Merton, the supreme answer to this return to the Deep Center was found in one’s identity. He expressed it in this way:

"Finding God" means much more than just abandoning all things that are not God, and emptying oneself of images and desires. If you succeed in emptying your mind of every thought and every desire, you may indeed withdraw into the center of yourself and concentrate everything within you upon the imaginary point where your life springs out of God: yet you will not really find God. No natural exercise can bring you into vital contact with Him. Unless He utters Himself in you, speaks His own name in the center of your soul, you will no more know Him than a stone knows the ground upon which it rests in its inertia. Our discovery of God is, in a way, God's discovery of us. . . We become contemplatives when God discovers Himself in us.¹²

Elsewhere, Merton wrote:

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God . . . Ultimately the only way I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence. Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him."¹³

But one must be aware that there is the self that resists finding the Deep Center: the self that seeks to forget and more intentionally flees the Deep Center. It is much easier to be an "operator of religion" than to be invaded by the Deep Center, which is Jesus, the Christ. Thomas Kelly, that Quaker scholar whose book, *A Testament of Devotion* has become a contemporary spiritual classic, said:

Instead of being the active, hurrying church worker and the anxious, careful planner of shrewd moves toward the good life, we become pliant creatures, less brittle, less obstinately rational. The energizing, dynamic center is not in us but in the Divine Presence in which we share. Religion is not *our* concern; it is God's concern. The sooner we stop thinking *we* are the energetic operators of religion and discover that God is at work, as the Aggressor, the Invader, the Initiator, so much the sooner do we discover that our task is to call men (sic.) to *be still and know*, listen, harken in quiet invitation to the subtle promptings of the Divine. Our task is to encourage others first and let go, to cease striving, to give over this fevered effort of the self-sufficient religionist trying to please an external deity. Count on God knocking on the doors of time. God is the Seeker, and not we alone; He is anxious to swell out our time-nows into an Eternal Now by

filling them with a sense of Presence. I am persuaded that religious people do not with sufficient seriousness count on God as an active factor in the affairs of the world. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," but too many well-intentioned people are so preoccupied with the clatter of effort to do something for God that they don't hear Him asking that He might do something *through* them.¹⁴

But there is also a far greater resistance within me that refuses to accept "a unifying transcendent foundation."¹⁵ Louis Dupre' is certain that the basic issue that we all are dealing with in Western society today is just this lack of a transcendent unifying Center. Its erosion over the last several centuries has been documented amply by many.

The failure of empirical science and technology to provide the lasting integration of life is much in evidence. Even those who would choose a self-improvement center or human-fulfillment model, *a la* Maslow, should read the words of Maslow just before his death:

I should say also that I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still "higher" Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like . . . Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, we get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic. We need something "bigger than we are" to be awed by to commit ourselves to . . .¹⁶

Religious life in our nation has not been immune to the ultimate solutions for solving this "transcendence crisis." Fundamentalists, holding to an objective religious viewpoint where there is much clarity in beliefs and solutions, have eschewed any ambiguity and have offered the certainty of formulas. Liberal Christians have not fared much better with their offer of a totally objective, rationalistic, naturalistic explanation for all of religious life and the certainty in doing good. Liberals have made ethics the "Great Beyond." Dupre' again reminds us, "True moral pioneers have always had to break the established moral code in the name of a higher good."¹⁷ No moral code of behavior, no doctrinal formula or accepted religious practice can substitute for the Deep Center. It always lies beyond.

Dupre' helps us capture the needed transcendent vision when he says that the mystic may be the way of helping persons

today who, even in religious life, exist as their own points of reference, refusing to accept a more obscure way of transcendent integration:

Thus the ultimate message of the mystic about the nature of selfhood is that the self is *essentially* more than a mere self, that transcendence belongs to its nature as much as the act through which it is imminent to itself, and that a total failure on the mind's part to realize this transcendence reduces the self to *less* than itself. The general trend of our civilization during the last centuries has not been favorable to that message. Its tendency has been to reduce the self to its most immediate and lowest common experiences. But for this restriction we pay the price of an all-pervading feeling of unfulfilment and, indeed, of dehumanization. Deprived of its transcendent dimension selfhood lacks the very space it needs for full self-realization.¹⁸

Life rooted in the Deep Center allows all other dimensions of life to find their proper place. Their integration is from the Deep Center. Physical, sexual life is not negated and denied, but allowed its rightful role. The functionality of thinking (reason) and the ability to make things happen does not become an end in itself, but becomes the means to incarnate that which is discovered in the Deep Center. Particular, momentary pulsations of a culture are heard and placed in their proper place. Life takes place and is integrated from the Deep Center.

That is why Jesus responded to busy, responsible, active Martha's complaint about Mary's sitting at the feet of Jesus with these words: "Martha, Martha, you are fretting and fussing about so many things; but one thing is necessary. The part that Mary has chosen is best; and it shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42, NEB).

The "one thing necessary" that turns our fussing and fretting into an integrated busyness is found in the Deep Center. It allows one to explore the eight polarities of campus ministry—to work under the load of daily student work and not be weary. It is a less certain way with few road signs, more ambiguity. The Great Beyond is like that; the Deep Center is bottomless. The More Than never lets us be satisfied with what we presently hold. It is filled with painful growth and lots of time just waiting and listening. But it provides a deeper integration of life than those "centers" that now seek to carry the load of a human life in less fulfilling ways.

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Our calling is to be Mary-Martha's, or Martha-Mary's, depending on your temperament, and to work with praying hands, or to pray with working hands. We are to make both requests in campus ministry: "Who is my neighbor?" and "Lord teach us to pray." But it is always the Mary-Center that integrates our busy-ness, our many ways of being present on campus.

ENDNOTES

1. Kristen Johnson Ingram, *With the Huckleberry Christ*. Minneapolis: Winston, 1985.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
3. See Adrian van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation*, Vol. 1 in *Formative Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad, 1983, pp. 145 ff.
4. See the discussion of this problem by Ben C. Fisher, *New Pathways: A Dialogue in Christian Higher Education*. Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1980; Ben C. Fisher, *The Challenge of Secularism To Christian Higher Education*. Nashville: Education Commission, SBC, 1982; and Robert Rankin, ed., *The Recovery of Spirit in Higher Education*. New York: Seabury, 1980.
5. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978, p. 200, p. 168, p.201.
6. John Killinger. *Fundamentals of Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986 as quoted in a review of the book by David B. Watermulder, *The Christian Century*, May 21-28, 1986, p. 528.
7. M. Basil Pennington, *Called: New Thinking on Christian Vocation*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983, p. 6.
8. John Main, *Moment of Christ*. New York: Crossroad, 1986, pp. 2-3.
9. Louis Dupre', *The Deeper Life*. New York: Crossroad, 1981, p. 24.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
11. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1961, p. 3.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
14. Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*. New York: Harper and Row, 1941, pp. 96-97.
15. Louis Dupre', *Transcendent Selfhood: The Rediscovery of the Inner Life*. New York: Seabury, 1976, p. 62.
16. Abraham H. Maslow, "Preface to the Second Edition," *Toward A Psychology of Being*, Second Edition. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968, pp. iii-iv.
17. Dupre', *Transcendent Selfhood*, p. 40.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 104.