



Three Aspects of Spirituality (1990)

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Lifelong Nurture and Continuing Maturation of Faith. From an educational viewpoint, spirituality, and especially the experiences, activities, meditations, and studies that nurture spiritual essence of human life can be conceptualized as a three-sided space. Every Christian, at a given moment of life, is positioned somewhere within that triangular field, closer to one corner or another, or perhaps located in the exact center. With every passing day, and according to the seasons of life, one moves about in this space, thus emphasizing or drawing upon the set of three nurturing processes in a refreshing and renewing way—or else clings stubbornly to one corner in preference to the others.

The three corners represent three venerable nurturing processes in the demonstration and maturing of spirituality:

1. **Learning from the Book.** Lewis Sperry Chafer, in *He That Is Spiritual*, exemplifies and thoroughly expounds the strength and vitality of this “corner” of the triangular space. Major emphasis is on the knowing of what God has said about the spiritual life and the ways in which Christian spirituality is nurtured by the Word and by God’s Spirit. Because of the emphasis on scholastic rationalism among evangelicals, this form of spiritual nurture has broadest acceptance and is least vulnerable to criticism.

2. **Developing through meditation upon the Person and Work of Christ.** Thomas à Kempis, in *The Imitation of Christ*, exemplifies that sort of spiritual meditation and discipline that fulfills the mystical identification with the person of Jesus Christ. Although many people in the evangelical tradition associate the images of spiritual mysticism with the pre-Reformation Roman church, the literature of Christian meditation has always been appreciated by those who see the importance of prayer and fasting. This focus on the person of Christ and the majesty of God has its place in spiritual nurturance, especially among those who value a regular devotional schedule.

3. **Manifesting and nurturing spirituality through the works of godly justice.** Donal Dorr, in *Spirituality and Justice*, focuses the most controversial of the three corners of the triangle. By no means is this book alone, but its effectiveness in connecting the biblical materials to the ministries of Christian help and witness in an unjust world is exemplary. For many evangelicals the re-discovery of the Epistle of James and the awakening of social consciousness have led to the recognition of the powerful effect that applied ministry and the works of the Gospel have in the life of the spiritually maturing believer.

The leader among the people of God must be committed to a lifelong spiritual development in which some sort of appropriate relationship among these three experiences is discovered and maintained.