

*A Spirituality
of the
Road*

A Spirituality of the Road

David J. Bosch

Introduction by Cornelius J. Dyck

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Introduction

Many Christians in North America are showing a new concern for spirituality in recent years. The social concerns of the late sixties and early seventies have, it seems, given way to a more inner-directed search for meaning and faith. For some this may be no more than the swing of a pendulum phenomenon from activism to passivism in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, but for many it seems to reflect the longing for deeper biblical and moral roots in the face of the baffling social and political problems.

The decision to focus the spring 1978 sessions of the Mennonite Missionary Study Fellowship (MMSF) on the theme "A Spirituality of the Road" grew from a concern to help those engaged in this search, hoping to lead away from a false kind of spirituality which is content with inwardness alone at the expense of active discipleship lived in the here and now.

The planners of the sessions were not disappointed in their expectations. Based on a study of the Apostle Paul's life and work as reflected in his second letter to the

Corinthians, David J. Bosch brought to these presentations his broad experience as a missionary and churchman, together with profound theological insight and a modest, unassuming spirit that went right to the heart of issues of spirituality with words of both indictment and comfort. While the focus of 2 Corinthians and these lectures is on the missionary situation, the insights shared speak to every Christian concerned for faithfulness. The author rejects a self-seeking, personally selfish spirituality, and in place of the Pilgrim's Progress model on the one hand, or the Jonah model on the other, unequivocally advocates as a third model that of the cross, which is sensitive to both the misery of man and the glory of God.

Dr. David J. Bosch is well known in church circles for his missionary and ecumenical contributions, for his courageous and gentle spirit. He is the editor of *Missionalia*, and Professor of Theology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. His five presentations at the MMSF sessions were most warmly received, and are commended to all who would grow in the life of the Spirit.

The MMSF is an informally organized group of people meeting annually under the sponsorship of the Institute of Mennonite Studies to reflect on issues relating to Christian mission. In addition to manifest gratitude to Dr. Bosch, appreciation is expressed here to Wilbert R. Shenk and Robert L. Ramseyer for help in planning the sessions and to Suzanne Keeney Lind for her skill in helping to bring the manuscript to press.

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A Spirituality of the Road

(2 Corinthians 1:1-4; 11:16-31)

I confess that the word “spirituality” has always caused me a degree of uneasiness. Perhaps this has to do with the idea I, and apparently many others as well, have always had about what spirituality seems to mean. By and large, I would guess, most people identify it almost exclusively with what is also known as our “devotional life.” And this is always a sensitive area.

Some fourteen years ago the United Presbyterian Church sent its missionaries who were on furlough a questionnaire about the problems they experienced in their overseas work. In one category in the questionnaire the missionaries were asked to indicate in which of the following nine areas they were experiencing difficulties: (1) pursuing devotional life, (2) having friends with whom hair can be let down, (3) doubts over their call, (4) severe anxiety, (5) periods of depression, (6) alcohol, (7) sexual temptations, (8) theological doubts or ambiguities,

(9) fear least they lose their Christian principles.

I think you can guess which one of the nine came out top: almost every missionary admitted having problems in pursuing a satisfactory devotional life! Let us be careful, however, and not deduce too much from this confession. After all, to admit that your devotional life is not quite what it should be counts in your favor. It is a sign of spirituality to admit that you are not as spiritual as you would like to be, and, of course, it is a sign of lack of spirituality, or hypocrisy, to suggest that you do not have any difficulties in this area.

The same does not apply to the other areas in that questionnaire. We are expected to admit problems in the area of devotional life. We are not expected, as missionaries at least, to admit that we sometimes have to fight sexual temptations. Neither, apparently, are presidential candidates expected to make such admissions! You will remember that Jimmy Carter discovered this following a *Playboy* interview several years ago.

The same applies to other areas in the questionnaire. Missionaries are *not* supposed to have doubts over their call, nor to suffer from severe anxiety or periods of depression, nor to have problems with alcohol. Neither should they need somebody with whom hair could be let down; after all, they ought to take their troubles to the Lord! And if they are really spiritual people, so the belief goes, they will not have these problems anyhow.

I have to admit, though, that I experience some difficulties with the U.P.C. questionnaire. The nine items listed are not all necessarily comparable on the same level. Thus, when I, in preparing for this conference, compiled a questionnaire for Mennonite missionaries, I