The Evangelistic Triadlogue:
Gospel Communication with the Holy Spirit\(^1\)

Brian A. DeVries

More than four decades ago, Rueben Baerg complained about the scarcity of attention given in missiological literature to the Holy Spirit’s role in evangelistic communication.\(^2\) Likewise, Harry Boer offered a similar assessment more than a half-century ago.\(^3\) Unfortunately, we must also note that the same lacuna remains in the literature today.\(^4\) This is not to say that the divine Spirit is never mentioned in recent communication theories produced by evangelical missiology, for he is rarely omitted there. Rather, the weakness lies in the lack of attention given to the pivotal implications of the Spirit’s sovereign and supernatural role in the communication process—a role that is sometimes beyond the description of the behavioral sciences and that is always beyond their prescription (cf. John 3:8). Biblical pneumatology, however, has serious implications for Christian communication theory that must not be overlooked.

How then should Christian theories account for the role of the Spirit in evangelistic communication? Some might argue that the “application of

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\(^2\) “A dimension of communication which, regrettably, is largely overlooked, has to do with ‘the supernatural character of communication.’ Very few studies on communication include an analysis of the Holy Spirit’s function in the process of communication, and where reference is made to his person it is often scanty and brief.” Rueben M. Baerg, “The Holy Spirit in Communication,” in The Church in Mission, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno, Calif.: Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), 68.

\(^3\) “Much has been written about the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men, but very little about his crucial significance for the missionary witness of the church. The subject has not been wholly ignored but, while it deserved to be central in missionary reflection, it has been allowed to remain at the periphery.” Harry R. Boer, Pentecost and Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 12.

\(^4\) For a thorough review of the literature, see DeVries, “Witnessing with the Spirit,” 18–94.
communication theory to the work of the minister minimizes the direct work of God’s Spirit upon the human mind and elevates the human instrument.”

Further, they might argue that it was the apostle Paul’s practice to consciously avoid the use of rhetoric and any dependence on “persuasive words of human wisdom,” preaching only Christ and him crucified “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:1–5 NKJV). Thus, they might conclude, we must not mix the human wisdom of communication theory with the divinely appointed means of gospel proclamation.

However, it is necessary to be precise here. Paul does not avoid the use of all rhetoric (i.e., the art of verbal communication), but rather certain types of rhetoric that depended on “persuasive words of human wisdom” in place of dependence on the Spirit. As Duane Litfin argues, “Paul was determined to depend upon the spiritual dynamic of the cross rather than the human dynamic of the persuader.” Paul’s rhetoric, therefore, was not patterned after the Greco-Roman rhetoric of his day but consciously chosen and used to highlight “Christ and Him crucified” so that the faith of those who believed would be properly grounded. This being the case, we cannot avoid the use of communication and should not avoid studying the communication process; only then can we more effectively proclaim the gospel of Christ in dependence on the Spirit.

Communication theory for evangelistic proclamation, however, must depend on the Spirit’s sovereign and supernatural role in evangelism. As suggested above, this is a glaring weakness of most literature on communication in evangelical missiology. While there are a few exceptions to this generalization, very little attention is given to the sovereign and super-

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7 “As in the planting of the seed or the rearing of the child, the more we know of natural law—the divinely ordained order of the universe—the more effectively we can work within its structure…. It is precisely because he believes that language and the human mind are both products of God’s creation and because he believes that God has deliberately chosen to communicate with men through the medium of human language that the minister is rewarded by study of the communication process.” Sargent, “Communication and the Spirit,” 15.

8 For example, Marvin Mayers claims his approach is “to restore the Holy Spirit to His rightful place in the mission enterprise.” Marvin K. Mayers, Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Cross-Cultural Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 27. It is unfortunate that Mayers gives little attention to the Spirit in the rest of his book after these initial statements.

9 Baerg’s essay is most helpful in this regard: “Many of our efforts in communication, even with the accessibility and proficient use of the latest techniques of communication are at best the achievements of the ‘flesh,’ if the spiritual dimension of the Holy Spirit’s communication is disregarded. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome our human weaknesses and barriers. Only
natural role of the Spirit. Part of the problem, no doubt, is the difficulty of quantifying the spiritual and supernatural aspects of divine-human communication. Some evangelicals have found ways to harness the behavioral sciences in order to aid gospel communication, thus developing a “scientific missiology” that highlights the phenomenological aspects of human-to-human communication but struggles to account for the spiritual dimension. The problem, however, lies deeper. Many communication theories have omitted the Spirit, not only because the supernatural dimension is difficult to quantify or because they have chosen to focus primarily on human-to-human communication, but also because they fail—at least in practice—to maintain a dependence on the sovereign Spirit, a dependence that the apostle Paul was very careful to promote.

For example, the communication theory espoused by James Engel gives helpful attention to the role of the Spirit in the conversion process. In effect, however, it appears that Engel bifurcates the divine and human roles in evangelistic communication, saying very little about the implications of the sovereign Spirit’s role upon the human role. He should be commended for factoring in the Spirit’s role and for Christian reflection on communication theory, but he does not go far enough. Rather, the role of the human evangelist must at all times be determined by and be dependent on the activity of the sovereign Spirit.

Evangelical missiology, therefore, still needs a theory of gospel communication that is grounded in and shaped by a biblical pneumatology. Many recent evangelical theories provide helpful insights for the communication process, but most of them appear to be guilty of “the flaw of the excluded Spirit.” As Baerg wrote four decades ago,

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He can furnish the believer with the dynamics for effective communication.” Baerg, “The Holy Spirit in Communication,” 80, emphasis original. Nida also grapples with the supernatural role of the Spirit in communication, but he does not explain how the entire gospel communication process is dependant on the Holy Spirit; Eugene A. Nida, Message and Missions: The Communication of the Christian Faith (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 228–29.

10 Hiebert writes, “In recent years in evangelical missions, we have been so fascinated by the power of the social sciences that we are in danger of leaving our biblical foundations, and, in the process, of losing the heart and soul of mission. We need to return to the Scriptures to lay the foundations for a theology of mission for the next century.” Paul G. Hiebert, “The Social Sciences and Missions: Applying the Message,” in Missiology and the Social Sciences, ed. Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1996), 202.

11 Moreover, at key points in his book, Engel reminds his readers that “Christian communication is a cooperative effort between God and man” and that “because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are limited in our ability to draw upon and apply uncritically principles derived from the secular world.” James F. Engel, Contemporary Christian Communications (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 320.

12 This technical term is a modification of Paul Hiebert’s “flaw of the excluded middle” theory that highlighted how scholars had overlooked the spiritual realities of the
Contemporary scholarship, while not repudiated by conservative students of the Scriptures, must nevertheless be placed in proper perspective and position in relation to the supernatural character of divine communication. We must recognize that the Holy Spirit’s primary mission is to communicate the things of Christ and to show them to the hearts and minds of men. This scholarship cannot do; only the Spirit of God can accomplish this task.\textsuperscript{13}

Assuming the sovereign Spirit’s crucial role in gospel communication, how, then, should we understand gospel communication?\textsuperscript{14} The following four propositions allow us to grapple with this question in logical sequence. The first step is to recognize that all evangelistic witness is more than merely a human-to-human conversation about ideas. It is, rather, the divine-human encounter of a rebellious sinner with the claims of the Word of Christ.

**Trialogical Communication**

*Proposition 1: Evangelistic communication must be understood as trialogical communication and not as dialogical or monological communication.*

The communication process in all gospel witness is a trialogue. This assertion is crucial to our entire study. The assortment of Greek lexemes that cluster around the New Testament concept of witness (Greek: *martus*) all share in common the essential activity of transmitting a message to an audience. It is foundational for our methodology to establish that this transmission—this communication process—is communication among three persons: the human evangelist, the unbelieving sinner, and the triune God. Further, it is essential to maintain the distinctives of this trialogue in all evangelistic methodologies.

Evangelistic witness is not a *monologue*. It is not a human evangelist pontificating on a personal point of view. Peter emphatically denies any officious pronouncements of this nature (2 Peter 1:16–21). It is also not a monologue between God and the unbeliever, with the evangelist acting as a mechanical transmission device. In John 15:26–27 (ESV), Jesus spoke of two distinct persons who both actively witness of him: “But when the Helper comes … the Spirit of truth … he will bear witness [Greek: *martus*] about me. And you also will bear witness.” Though the Spirit speaks with and through the evangelist, the separate identity and unique personality of the evangelist is not lost in the process. The Spirit does not possess the cosmological domain between the natural and supernatural. It is true that the Spirit has not been excluded from the larger body of evangelistic literature in evangelical missiology, but the Spirit does appear to be excluded from most theories of gospel communication.

\textsuperscript{13}Baerg, “The Holy Spirit in Communication,” 82–83, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{14}The term *gospel communication* here includes the activities of evangelistic preaching, gospel witness, and missionary apologetics.
evangelist in a way similar to many accounts of demonic possession where the evil spirit takes complete physical control of the individual, causing him or her to speak and do things unawares. Rather, in much the same way as the Spirit inspired the Old Testament and New Testament authors (cf. 2 Peter 1:16–21; 2 Tim. 3:16), the Spirit illumines and empowers the human evangelist as he or she communicates the Word.

The evangelistic witness is not a dialogue. The evangelist and the unbeliever do not dialogue as they together seek to find a deeper understanding of the truth. There is, of course, a two-way exchange of words between the evangelist and his or her audience. The essential methodology is also not dialogical, not only because there are three persons involved, but also because the essential message is a proclamation and not a conversation.

Rather, gospel communication is more accurately described as a divine-human triolgue among the human evangelist, the unbeliever, and God the Holy Spirit. Most evangelistic methodologies seem to concentrate on the communicative relationship between the human evangelist and the unbeliever—the only area of direct human involvement in the process and the area most easily examined philosophically or phenomenologically.

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15 It is important here to distinguish between dialogue as a mode or form of a two-way exchange of a message and dialogue as the essential system or method of communication. Regarding dialogue as an essential method or forum for together finding out the truth about God, Lloyd-Jones writes, “God is not to be discussed or debated. God is not a subject for debate, because He is Who He is and What He is”; “there is no neutral point at which the Christian and the non-Christian can meet, there is no common starting point as it were.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 46–51.

16 In his exegetical study refuting ecumenical views of dialogue, Marshall concludes, “Dialogue was not the primary means of presentation of the gospel in the early [NT] church…. We have found very little evidence indeed to suggest that the church’s own thinking was significantly influenced by dialogue with non-Christians, or indeed that dialogue within the church played a significant part in the development of doctrine…. There is not the slightest suggestion that the church and the world conversed as equal partners in the search for truth.” I. Howard Marshall, “Dialogue with Non-Christians in the New Testament,” Evangelical Review of Theology 16 (1992): 45; cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Early Christian Mission (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1393–94. Yet, says Marshall, “It still remains true that Christians must practice dialogue with non-Christians. On the one hand, only by means of dialogue can they come to an understanding of the situation of non-Christians and how the gospel answers their needs. On the other hand, as the examples in the Gospels show, Jesus responded to the questions raised by the people whom he met, and above all he sought to involve them in a personal encounter with the claims of God on their lives by bringing them in to a situation of dialogue in which they were invited to respond to his message” (46). David Hesselgrave agrees: “In no way can New Testament dialogue be constructed as lacking in a concern for either truth or persons. In no way can it be constructed as militating against proclamation and conversion. Dialogue was a method; proclamation was its nature; and conversion was its goal.” David J. Hesselgrave, Theology and Mission (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 234.

17 There is much literature on this third segment of the triolgue. For several prominent missiological examples of communication theory, see Carley H. Dodd, Dynamics of
All evangelistic methodologies, however, are incomplete if they overlook the other two relationships in this triolgue: The Holy Spirit empowers and witnesses with the evangelist and the Holy Spirit calls, illumines, and convicts the unbeliever.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The apostle Paul concisely explains this trialogical witness in 2 Corinthians, adding another dimension to the whole:

That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ [or, “on behalf of Christ we represent”), as though God were pleading through [dia] us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.... We then, as workers together with Him [Greek: sun-ergountes] also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 5:19–20, 6:1 NKJV)

Here we see the three relationships in this trialogical ministry of reconciliation. The first relationship is between the unbeliever and the triune God against whom the unbeliever has sinned and from whom the mediator and message of reconciliation comes. The second relationship is between the triune God and the evangelist, who has been given a ministry with its message, who while in Christ—united to him by the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 3:1–4:6)—speaks as a representative on Christ’s behalf, and who works together with the Spirit of Christ by making earnest appeals to unbelievers. The third relationship is between the empowered evangelist and the unbeliever—the means by which God in Christ and the Spirit of Christ pleads with unbelievers. Paul’s added dimension in this divine-human triolgue must not be overlooked for it is the essential message of the entire communication process: the person and work of Christ.

In this trialogical communication, therefore, the human evangelist is the dependent person—in relation to the independence of the sovereign triune God—and, thus, the evangelist communicates as an ambassador between two persons who already have a relationship. The evangelist does not enter into a new relationship, either with an unevangelized unbeliever or with someone who has already heard the gospel, but he engages in a relationship that already exists. The unbeliever has already had dealings with the triune God, for he has already suppressed the truth of God in

unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18–32), has already been accused by his own conscience (Rom. 2:14–15), and has, in many cases, already rejected the gospel promise. The evangelist, then, does not join in trialogue with a neutral relationship between two unknown people, but rather, from the very beginning, communicates in a situation that needs reconciliation. God has already spoken, and the unbeliever—whoever he or she may be—has already sinned against him (Rom. 3:9–18). Even when witnessing to previously unevangelized people, we can say with J. H. Bavinck that “we do not open the discussion, but we need only make it clear that the God who has revealed His eternal power and Godhead to them, now addresses them in a new way, through our words”18 (cf. Acts 13:38–41; 17:30–31).

The Conduits of Communication

How does this ministry of reconciliation look in the language of contemporary communication theory? Consider the following observations about various relationships or conduits of communication within this trialogue.

First, the triune God has already spoken to the unbeliever by means of general revelation, innate knowledge, and the human conscience. This relationship, however, is a broken conduit of communication, or, perhaps better put, a breaking conduit due to the vortex of vice in the unbeliever’s frantic flight away from God (Rom. 1:18–32). The more the loving, gracious God speaks through general and/or special revelation, the more the unbeliever refuses to hear his voice. This broken relationship of communication can only be restored through the unilateral mediation and redemption of Jesus Christ and through the irresistible application of his redemption by the Holy Spirit.

Second, the triune God in Christ has a relationship of communication and fellowship with the evangelist. The evangelist has been united with the triune God in Christ and has been indwelt by the Spirit. Open communication exists, therefore, between them both by the inspired Word and the internal witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14–27). Through this constant communication, the evangelist is increasingly anointed, equipped, empowered, and made competent for the evangelistic witness of Christ to unbelievers.

Third, the evangelist seeks to communicate with the unbeliever. This conduit of communication is the focus (often exclusively) of most communication theories. It also is a two-way form of communication; unlike the divine-human relationship, it is a bilateral relationship between coequals. The evangelist, therefore, may use the whole range of acceptable communication methods and modes to establish and strengthen this conduit.

Fourth, the evangelist witnesses with the Spirit to communicate the

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Word of Christ to the unbeliever. This divine-human co-witness of the Word is the core of evangelistic communication. It is the objective and/or subjective testimony, the natural and/or supernatural encounter, the inspired and complete Word of God prophetically spoken again by the Spirit through the human evangelist. The spoken Word speaks, if made effectual by the Spirit joining with it, both mediatelly to the unbeliever’s mind-heart and immediately in the unbeliever’s heart-soul.

Fifth, the evangelist desires that the triune God will restore communication between himself and the unbeliever. If the Spirit joins with the Word in order to effectually call, convict, and illumine the unbeliever, then new spiritual life will be recreated, accompanied by faith and its fruits. By this new life of faith, the once-unbeliever will be irresistibly transformed within and will begin to be shaped into a new form without as well. When communication has been restored between the triune God and the former unbeliever, the communication of the evangelist—and the three-horizon contextualization of the message communicated—becomes secondary to the primary new Word-Spirit communicative relationship.

Thus, the human evangelist’s desire in evangelistic witness is for communication to be restored between the triune God and the once-rebelling sinner. Because the evangelist has experienced fellowship with the triune God in Christ, he or she desires that other people experience the same fellowship (cf. 1 John 1:2–3) and, therefore, passionately engages in evangelistic communication. Put differently, the goal of the human evangelist is for fellowship to be restored between the triune God and the unbeliever (conduit #5); the evangelistic methodology is co-witnessing of Christ with the Spirit (conduit #4); and the primary evangelistic means for the human evangelist is to establish a conduit of communication with the unbeliever (conduit #3).

This evangelistic trialogue, therefore, is a model we can use to explain the mutual co-witness of the Holy Spirit and the human evangelist (cf. John 15:26–27). It is a theory of gospel communication that is patterned after Paul’s ministry of reconciliation and developed in order to highlight the Spirit’s pivotal role in this ministry. As such, it is helpful in explaining how we as human witnesses can partner with the Spirit as we share with fellow sinners the message of reconciliation in Christ. The following three propositions each consider an aspect of this evangelistic trialogue.

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19 Three-horizon contextualization is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The literature on contextualization would be greatly aided by considering specifically the various conduits of communication in this evangelistic trialogue. Much of the popular literature confuses the third and fourth relationship, while much of the more academic literature confuses the second, fourth, and fifth.
Divine-Human Co-witness

*Proposition 2: Evangelistic communication is a cooperative divine-human activity that is dependant on and shaped by the Holy Spirit’s monergistic work in regeneration.*

The first aspect of the evangelistic trialogue to be considered in detail is how the divine and human witnesses cooperate in gospel communication. For example, J. I. Packer describes the divine and human agency in evangelism as a cooperation of mutual activities:

In the last analysis, there is only one *agent* of evangelism: namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ Himself who through His Holy Spirit enables His servants to explain the gospel truly and apply it powerfully and effectively; just as it is Christ Himself who through His Holy Spirit opens men’s minds and hearts to receive the gospel, and so draws them savingly to Himself.  

Likewise, the Manila Manifesto affirms: “God the evangelist gives his people the privilege of being his ‘fellow workers.’ For, although we cannot witness without him, he normally chooses to witness through us.”

Christian believers, then, witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ *together with* the Holy Spirit. What does this mutual agency look like in evangelistic practice? Here, we must note both the mutual cooperation and specific distinctions in this divine-human co-witness of Christ.

**Cooperation in Gospel Communication**

The *locus classicus* for the co-witness of the Spirit and human evangelists, already quoted above, is Jesus’ comforting words to His disciples in John 15:26–27. The same truth is confessed by the apostle Peter after the Spirit had been poured out at Pentecost: “And we are [Jesus’] witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32 *nkjv*). Later, Peter gives further explanation in his first epistle: “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel [*euangelidzo*] to you by [*en*] the Holy

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21 J. D. Douglas, ed., *Proclaim Christ Until He Comes*, Lausanne II in Manila, International Congress on World Evangelization, 1989: Manila, Philippines (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990), 31. This same balanced tension is found in many major confessions (e.g., Canons of Dort 3.4.11–12 and 3.4.16; Lausanne a14 and a4).

22 On John 15:26–27, Calvin writes, “Christ means that the testimony of the Spirit will not be of such a nature that the apostles shall have it for their private advantage, or that they alone shall enjoy it, but that by them it will be widely diffused, because they will be organs of the Holy Spirit, as indeed, he spoke by their mouth. We now see in what way faith is by hearing (Romans 10:17), and yet it derives its certainty from the seal and earnest of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14).” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), John 15:26–27.
Spirit sent \textit{[apostello]} from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12 \textit{NKJV}). Here, we find the phrase, \textit{evangelizing by/with/in} \textit{[en]} the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament spoke with and through the prophets in predicting the future sufferings and glory of Christ (1:10–11), so the same Spirit now informs the New Testament believers by preaching the gospel with New Testament evangelists. Indeed, the Scriptures relate many other examples of this divine-human cooperation in witness (e.g., Luke 24:48–49; Acts 1:8; Heb. 2:4). From the diversity in content and form of this New Testament witness, we can conclude that the apostles and other believers in the New Testament church had considerable freedom in the manner by which they communicated the gospel but that in each case they were dependant on and guided by the sovereign Spirit.

We must draw attention to at least two aspects of this cooperation in witness that lie in back of the New Testament narrative and indicate important nuances or tones to this central New Testament activity. First, there is often a prophetic-judicial tone to Spirit-empowered witness in the New Testament. Christ’s instruction in Acts 1:8 (\textit{NKJV}) is a key verse in this regard, as well as in the whole of the New Testament narrative: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses \textit{[martus]} to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This verse has direct parallels to at least two Old Testament passages: It echoes the Spirit’s words in Psalm 2:8 where the sovereign God has decreed that his anointed Son will be given the nations for an eternal inheritance and where the anointed Son is depicted as crushing all opposition to his kingly rule (cf. Acts 4:24–31; Rev. 19:15). Acts 1:8 also echoes the Spirit’s words in Isaiah 43:8–12, where YHWH appeals to the witness of the Old Testament covenant people to vindicate his righteousness before the alleged deities of the surrounding nations. Indeed, the Old Testament prophetic dialogue is often cast in legal terms as a courtroom scene in which God vindicates his righteousness in Israel and among the nations. This same imagery is echoed in the New Testament, fulfilled through Spirit-empowered witness. For example, Luke highlights the judicial character of Paul’s witness: “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified \textit{[martus]} for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness \textit{[martus]} at Rome”’ (Acts 23:11 \textit{NKJV}; cf. Acts 9:15; John 16:7–11, Rom. 1:16–17, 1 Tim. 3:16). The New Testament witness of the gospel also has direct parallels to the Old Testament Spirit of prophecy. In this sense, all Spirit-empowered witnesses in this now-present post-Pentecost pre-Parousia age speak prophetically in their authoritative proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, “for the testimony \textit{[martus]} of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10 \textit{NKJV}; cf. Rev. 11:3, 10:11; 1 Cor. 14).\footnote{Any Spirit-empowered speech in the postapostolic church, whether classified as prophecy or not, must be bounded and tested by the closed canon of both the OT and NT. It is in
Second, there is also a priestly didactic tone to the New Testament witness in cooperation with the Spirit. In an extended section of 2 Corinthians, Paul highlights aspects of the “ministry of the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:8; 2:12–4:6). This ministry of the Spirit gives Paul great freedom and makes him very bold in proclaiming the gospel truth and for appealing to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. Likewise, later in this epistle, Paul speaks of his witness as the ministry of reconciliation; he appeals and persuades and is driven to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation to sinners (2 Cor. 5:11–21 NKJV). Indeed, Paul elsewhere describes his missionary witness as “ministering the gospel [or, the ‘priestly service of the gospel’] of God,” which ministry he performs “in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:16, 19 NKJV).

Both the prophetic-judicial and the priestly-didactic tones that lie in back of this witnessing with the Spirit are vitally important to remember when considering how we should develop our evangelistic methodologies. Witnessing is much more than just human communication between two or more persons. Rather, when we witness with the Spirit, the interaction becomes a divine-human encounter between the holy righteous God and a guilty rebellious sinner. Hence, the authority and seriousness with which Paul spoke: “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Indeed, Scripture suggests that the primary motivation of Spirit-empowered witness is not simply to tell unbelievers how much they are loved by God but rather to vindicate the righteousness of God in damning rebellious sinners who have rejected his Son and to proclaim the mercy and glory of a loving God who promises to save all those who repent and believe even though they deserve damnation. As Paul writes elsewhere, this communication always has eternal life-or-death consequences (2 Cor. 2:16; cf. John 9:39; Acts 13:45–47). Evangelistic methodologies that fail to recognize and maintain the eternal consequence of this divine-human encounter are impoverished at best.

Different Witnesses; Different Work

It is also important to note, however, the essential differences between God the evangelist and the human evangelists he has commissioned and empowered to be his witnesses in the entire world. Consider briefly,

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this sense that Puritans such as William Perkins spoke of preaching as the activity of prophesying. William Perkins, The Art of Prophesying (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1996). For exegetical treatment of this complex subject, see D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), especially 137–88. Such prophetic speech, however, is radically (from radix) different from the kind of prophetic speech defended in the last century by various charismatic leaders; see John Wimber and Kevin Springer, Power Evangelism (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); John Wimber and Kevin Springer, Power Healing (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).
therefore, the following four contrasts between the witness of the Holy Spirit and the concomitant witness of human evangelists.

First, the Spirit of God is sovereign, and human evangelists are dependent upon him, both to empower their witness and to open the spiritual eyes of those with whom they communicate. It is necessary for both conversion morphologies and evangelism theories, therefore, not only to distinguish the different roles of the Spirit and the human evangelist but also to do so in a way that maintains the sovereignty of the Spirit, or in other words, to describe the Spirit’s role as the independent factor upon which the human evangelist and all other variables must always remain dependent.24

Second, the Holy Spirit and the human witness have different approaches in their evangelistic work. As Thomas Watson states, “Ministers knock at the door of men’s hearts, the Spirit comes with a key and opens the door.”25 Or as J. I. Packer explains, the Spirit works both mediatelly with the Word on the mind and immediately with the Word in the heart, and, thus, his work is both moral by persuasion and physical by power.26 While the human witness, therefore, communicates externally to the mind and affections, hoping thus to reach the heart and challenge the will, the Spirit also, and at the same time, communicates internally to the heart and conscience, often confronting the will and making it willing in the day of his power.27

Third, the Spirit has chosen to use certain means, and the human evangelist is bounded by these means. Though the Spirit has chosen to work mediatelly—with general revelation, through human witnesses, and especially by the Word—in various aspects of the spiritual conversion process, the point of spiritual regeneration is the point at which the Spirit works

24 As John Owen writes, “Wherever the work [of the Spirit] is spoken of [in Scripture] with respect unto an active efficacy, it is ascribed unto God. He creates us anew, he quickens us, he begets us of his own will; but when it is spoken of with respect to us, there it is passively expressed; we are created in Christ Jesus, we are new creatures, we are born again, and the like.” John Owen, The Works of John Owen (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1965), 3.316–17, emphasis original.


27 Or to put it differently, the elenctic encounter of the Holy Spirit and the elenctic encounter of the human evangelist have different starting points. Both evangelistic agents—the Holy Spirit and the evangelist—speak the same revealed truth and both may use the same aids (conscience, reason, general revelation, and so forth). However, the Holy Spirit has direct access to the spiritual domains of the heart and the deep structures of worldview, while the evangelist must start with the surface structures of worldview, culture, and external manifestations of the heart in the life. Therefore, while the Spirit may direct his words of truth like precision-guided missiles into the heart matter to destroy the stronghold of sin, the evangelist must speak these words of truth in love and in a manner that is carefully contextualized for his particular audience.
immediately and powerfully in the soul. While the human evangelist, therefore, can participate with the Spirit in using the means for spiritual conversion, his work should be limited to using these means faithfully—participating in calling, illumination, and conviction—and leaving the outcome to the sovereign Spirit.

Fourth, the Spirit’s work is always effectual; the human evangelist’s work, therefore, should always be expectant. The Spirit always effectually accomplishes what he has intended to do, whether his purpose is only to vindicate God’s righteousness or whether it is also to renew spiritual life (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12–17). Therefore, writes Paul, human witnesses of Christ are sincere and earnest and even humbly triumphant in their evangelistic communication.28

Thus, the sovereign monergistic work of the Spirit in regeneration does not hinder evangelism but rather promotes its necessity, urgency, authenticity, and expectant dependency in God’s Spirit for its success.29 It is only on this foundation and within this framework that we can now develop a pneumatologically informed evangelistic theory.

Compassionate Confrontation

Proposition 3: The evangelistic encounter is a divinely authorized appeal for the restoration of communication between the holy, righteous, creator and the guilty, rebelling, unbeliever.

The second aspect of the evangelistic trialogue to be considered in detail—again dealing with Spirit-empowered communication between the evangelist and the sinner—is the method and message of evangelistic communication. While the message of gospel communication is always the same, there are many diverse methods for communicating it. Here, we will first consider two evangelistic methodologies that correctly highlight the Holy Spirit’s evangelistic role before we also consider further aspects of this single message of reconciliation in Christ.

Missionary Elenctics

The first method is ideally suited for evangelistic communication with non-Christians in a context of religious pluralism. It is an underlying methodology of evangelistic encounter, based on the concept of the Greek verb

28 Jonathan Edwards knew the secret of this humble dependence and expectancy of victory: “I think I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those in which the doctrines of God’s absolute sovereignty, with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty, with regard to answering prayer, and succeeding the plans, of natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on,” Works, 2.849–50.

29 For the classic treatment of this crucial assertion, see Packer, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, 96–109.
elegcho, used in John 16:8–11 to explain the Spirit’s conviction of sin and throughout the New Testament to explain the cooperative human activity in this process (Matt. 18:15; John 3:20, 16:8; 1 Cor. 14:24; Eph. 5:11; Titus 1:9; Rev. 3:19; cf. Prov. 3:13, 9:8; Isa. 1:18). Ultimately, at the spiritual level of the worldview and/or heart, only God the evangelist can encounter unbelievers and convince them of their rebellious response; it is the Holy Spirit who convicts or convinces [elegcho] the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Because elegcho is also used to explain human activity (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2), it serves as a helpful biblical concept from which the methodology of missionary elenctics develops.30

David Hesselgrave has recently drawn new attention to the literature of J. H. Bavinck, and highlights elenctics’ usefulness for understanding the divine-human encounter of gospel witness.31 Elenctics, Bavinck writes, “is the science [i.e., methodology] which unmasks to heathendom all false religions as sin against God, and it calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God.”32 In elenctics, the objective is to ask of the unbeliever the question, “What have you done with God?” in order to call for repentance before the triune God. It is often necessary, however, to first ask the question: “How are you responding to God’s revelation?” Though only the Holy Spirit can work spiritual regeneration, he usually strives with men in conjunction with human means. For this reason, the missionary evangelist must enter the world and speak the language of his or her audience. We must understand how they are responding to God so we can confront them at the exact point of their departure. For every unbeliever, the point of departure from God is their unique sinfulness; we must address each


32 Bavinck, Introduction to Missions, 222–23.
unique cultural expression of sin in their sociolinguistic context with the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Elenctics is, first, the work of the Spirit in the preregeneration encounter of sinners. As has already been hinted at above, the evangelist also has an important role: “It is the Holy Spirit himself who creates a basis. He awakens in man that deeply hidden awareness of guilt. He convinces man of sin, even where previously no consciousness of sin was apparently present”; yet, “The Holy Spirit uses the word of the preacher and touches the heart of the hearer, making it accessible to the word.” Thus, it is the word of the preacher and the person of the preacher that connects elenctics with evangelism. Elenctics can only be done in living contact with those we desire to reach.

The foundation and basis of elenctics can be nothing other than God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Fallen sinners are radically corrupted, and there are no hidden elements of truth that might make him favorably inclined to the gospel. Though rational arguments may be used in the process, the truth of Jesus Christ—when applied by the power of the Holy Spirit—is the only means that can break man’s rebellion against God’s revelation. Thus, elenctics is properly performed with a clear trust in God’s effectual grace. Bavinck writes, “We can never employ philosophical argumentation to build a bridge from a non-Christian religion to the Christian faith, a bridge which would make an inner change unnecessary, and would thus make superfluous the call to repentance.” Rather than trying with philosophical arguments to refute “the fabrication of idolatrous belief systems” and the worldview warfare in opposition with God, the evangelist should focus on the heart of the matter—the matter of the heart and/or worldview—and spend more time understanding how each unique unbeliever is responding to God’s revelation: “The concern is always with the all-important question: ‘What have you done with God?’”

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33 Ibid., 229.

34 In practice, he writes, “I am never in contact with Islam but with a Moslem and his Mohammedanism. If I seek to take a man by storm with general rules and norms derived from books, it is possible that I may miss the mark, and what I say may go over his head, because what he himself finds in his own religion, and the way in which he lives it, is something entirely different from what I had originally thought.” Bavinck, *Introduction to Missions*, 240–41.

35 Bavinck, *Introduction to Missions*, 230. “You do not then need to begin with endless rational argumentation in order to break the webs of his thoughts. In the grace of Jesus Christ you possess a more powerful means” (229).


37 Bavinck, *Introduction to Missions*, 223. This is not to minimize the value of Christian apologetics, but the rational arguments of philosophical apologetics are often not the best method in many non-Christian encounters, especially in an increasingly pluralistic and postmodern world.
The goal of this spiritual confrontation is spiritual repentance and faith that comes from spiritual regeneration. Though there are many aspects of the desired repentance and a need for understanding and precision, ultimately, the issue is a matter of guilt before God. Missionary elenctics, therefore, is a compassionate confrontation of sinners with the claims of Christ. It is the methodology that cooperates with the Holy Spirit in bringing unbelievers to the conviction, and hopefully confession, of their guilt before God. This compassionate confrontation of rebellious sinners is greatly aided by an understanding of the precise manner in which each unbeliever is suppressing God’s truth in unrighteousness, which locates the need and proper place of sociocultural anthropology in missiology.

Evangelistic Homiletics

The second method of gospel communication to consider here is the more conventional divine-human encounter known simply as evangelistic preaching. Nothing is novel about this methodology, and there is much literature on the subject, so our description here can be more concise. It is important to note briefly the underlying principles and manner in which this preaching is performed. Here, radical differences are often seen in the different types of preaching.

J. I. Packer draws a contrast between modern types of preaching and evangelism and the Puritan type of preaching and evangelism. This distinction is vital in evangelistic homiletics because the Puritan type is consistent with biblical pneumatology, whereas the modern types, argues Packer, are built on deviant theology. In “Puritan Evangelism,” Packer

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38 “To suggest that guilt before the true and holy God, shame before departed ancestors and present contemporaries, and fear before spirits and ghosts are somehow equal and interchangeable as motivations for conversion is to err. Insofar as biblical elenctics might involve shame, the shame must be that shame which Adam and Eve experienced—shame before a holy God. Insofar as biblical elenctics involves fear, it must be the fear of a just God. Primarily, however, elenchein refers to conviction of guilt. This is not so much cultural as it is transcultural and spiritual. Sin and guilt, atonement and forgiveness—these are not culturally derived accidents which are seized upon by God. They are supercultural and spiritual realities insisted upon by him.” Hesselgrave, “Missionary Elenctics and Guilt and Shame,” 480.


shows how “the task of winning souls” in Puritan evangelistic methodology was determined by the fact that “fallen man cannot turn to God by their own strength” and that it is not “in the power of the evangelists to make them do so, [for] the Puritan position was that only God, by his Spirit, through his word, can bring sinners to faith, and that he does this, not to our order, but according to his free purpose.” The implications of this methodology are significant: All devices for exerting psychological pressure must be avoided “as presumptive attempts to intrude into the province of the Holy Ghost.” Rejecting these devices is not a loss to the evangelistic enterprise because they do not contribute anything of lasting value. Forcing such tactics can only do damage to men’s souls; “high-speed evangelism is not a valid option.”

In addition to distinguishing Puritan preaching from the misuses of this methodology, we must also note the sine qua non of evangelistic homiletics, described variously as the anointing, illumination, unction, vitality, winging home, and/or empowerment of the Spirit. This empowerment of the Spirit in the evangelist or preacher, though vitally necessary, does not guarantee the saving power of the preached Word. The sine qua none of the Spirit’s immediate work in the hearts of the audience is also of crucial importance. All gospel communication, therefore, must highlight the vital witness of the Holy Spirit both with the evangelist and in the unbeliever’s heart.

The Message of Reconciliation

This essential message in gospel communication—when drawn from Scripture and witnessed with the Spirit—is more than simply words about

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41 Packer, Quest for Godliness, 163.
42 Ibid., 163–64. Therefore, argues Packer, “Evangelism must rather be conceived as a long-term enterprise of patient teaching and instruction, in which God’s servants seek simply to be faithful in delivering the gospel message and applying it to human lives, and leave it to God’s Spirit to draw men to faith through this message in his own way and at his own speed” (164). Elsewhere Packer writes, “Man’s task is simply to be faithful in teaching the word; it is God’s work to convince of its truth and write it in the heart. The Puritans would have criticized the modern evangelistic appeal, with its wheedling for ‘decisions,’ as an unfortunate attempt by man to intrude into the Holy Spirit’s province.” Packer, Quest for Godliness, 283.
44 “The task of the theologian and, indeed, the preacher is to hold these two elements in tension: the power of the Word and the direct action of the Spirit.... No man had greater reverence for the Word than Calvin ... But he was able to speak of the Spirit as ‘the internal teacher, by whose agency the promise of salvation, which would otherwise only strike the air on our ears, penetrates into our minds.’ And again, ‘Teachers would cry aloud to no purpose did not Christ, the internal teacher, by means of His Spirit, draw to Himself those who are given His of the Father.”’ Jones, Holy Spirit and Christian Preaching, 53.
the truth of God’s Word; it is the Word of God.⁴⁵ As ambassadors of God in Christ and when empowered by God’s Spirit, human evangelists speak the Word of God prophetically with supernatural power and authority.⁴⁶ Witnessing with the Spirit, therefore, is not merely a presentation or conversation based on conventional rules of rhetoric and developed from principles of secular communication theory. Rather, this divine-human co-witness of the Word is a compassionate confrontation of a rebelling sinner with the inescapable claims of Christ.

The Holy Spirit will always witness of the person and work of Christ, has inspired the completed canon of Scriptures that speaks of Christ the living Word, and now continues to join with the proclamation of this written Word of God as it is recommmunicated by human evangelists. The sovereign Spirit is not bound exclusively to this Word. He has sovereignly and normally chosen to speak mediately with this Word in effectual calling and spiritual conversion. Hence, though other seemingly more wise and powerful words were at his disposal, the apostle Paul consciously chose to communicate primarily with the seemingly foolish and powerless “word of the cross,” knowing by experience that this speech [logos] and preaching [kerygma] was the only sure foundation for authentic faith because these words would likely be joined with the proof and power of the Holy Spirit.

The essential message is the Word of God concerning Christ and his claims, and the implications of this truth are weighty. This means that all other aspects of Christian ministry—all methods and means and techniques and strategies other than communication of this essential message—are ancillary to the evangelistic witness of the Word of Christ. These ancillary means include social ministries, rational apologetics, and certainly various “signs and wonders.”⁴⁷ Yet, while the Word of Christ is

⁴⁵ Marcel, Relevance of Preaching, 30. “Whether this preached word be the law of the gospel, it is clothed with the very power of God and always accomplishes his work” (32). “It is God Himself who by means of preaching speaks to us and who calls all who hear to salvation in Jesus Christ” (61).

⁴⁶ As Herman Bavinck explains, the canon is closed and revelation is complete in Christ, yet it continues to be imparted to the people of God in Scripture by the Holy Spirit: “As the spiritual miracles do not add a new element to the objective facts of revelation but are only the working out of the miracle of God’s grace accomplished in Christ, so also the illumina-
tion of the Holy Spirit is not a revelation of things previously hidden but the application of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge present in Christ and displayed in his word.” Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 1, Prolegomena, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 384.

⁴⁷ “The broadening out of the kerygma to include social ministries, for example, can often dilute evangelism so that it tends to lose its punch. As a case in point, the contemporary ‘liberation theology’ has at times leaned in that direction.... Social liberation and action—or any other aspect of Christian ministry—has a legitimate place in the service of Christ; however, such cannot be equated with doing evangelism. It can certainly become the context of evangelistic proclamation, but it is not evangelizing per se. Social ministries
essential and primary, we must not overlook the ancillary value of other witnesses.  

Additionally, this truth about the essential message reaffirms that the evangelistic trialogue is a proclamation and not simply a conversation. It is a proclamation of the promise and judgment of the gospel. Not only do the Holy Spirit and human evangelist witness of the truth about God’s love for sinners, but they also witness of the exclusive claims of this love: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18 NKJV). Thus, Peter, after being empowered by the Spirit on Pentecost, boldly proclaimed the exclusive gospel truth and its piercing demand for repentance (Acts 2:23, 32, 38). It is this authority alone and these demands of the gospel that, for example, emboldened the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and gave J. H. Bavinck the courage to call for repentance.

Evangelistic Spirituality

**Proposition 4: The prerequisite for all evangelistic communication is the prior relationship of biblical spirituality between the triune God and the gospel communicator.**

The third aspect of the evangelistic trialogue to be considered in detail is the spiritual relationship between the divine and human witnesses in gospel communication. The last two propositions focused on the communicative relationships between the human evangelist and the unbelieving sinner. There, we considered how the Holy Spirit joined with the respoken are most important, but it is not evangelism in the pure biblical sense of the word.” Lewis A. Drummond, *The Word of the Cross: A Contemporary Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 215. Concerning apologetics in the same light, Drummond writes, “The discipline of apologetics is most important, especially in a secular age; but in the final analysis, all argumentation at best only knocks down other human arguments. It does not convince of God’s truth without the Spirit’s work” (216).

Concerning the value and use of common ancillary witnesses, see DeVries, “Witnessing with the Spirit,” 232–57.

For example, in one of his sermons, Jonathan Edwards stated, “If it be that ’tis the work of the Holy Ghost thus to convince men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, then we learn where ministers should have their dependence in their endeavors, even upon the Holy Ghost”; Jonathan Edwards, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost”; quoted in Stephen J. Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 155. Likewise, J. H. Bavinck wrote, “In all elenetics the concern is always with the all-important question: ‘What have you done with God?’ … it may never lack the call to repentance”; and “Elengehein does not in the first place refer to arguments which show the absurdity of heathendom. Its primary meaning refers to the conviction and unmasking of sin, and to call to responsibility. This entire concept undoubtedly lies in the religious moral sphere, and it can be understood only on this basis.” Bavinck, *Introduction to Missions*, 223, 226
message of reconciliation to make the Word relevant and effectual. Now, we will consider how the Spirit joins with and empowers the human evangelist to make him or her competent in this ministry of reconciliation. Indeed, the Spirit plays a vital role in the competence of the human messenger. This competence, however, is more than merely an ability to communicate understandably with an unbeliever. Much more than this is required for evangelistic communication that depends on and cooperates with the Holy Spirit.

As already noted, most practical literature on evangelism technique focuses largely and at times exclusively, on the relationship between the evangelist and the unbeliever with whom he or she is speaking (the third and fourth conduits of communication). Hence, most discussions about the evangelist’s competence usually focus on his or her abilities in relation to the unbeliever or within the particular sociocultural context. Of greater importance for Spirit-empowered evangelism, however, is the second conduit of communication in the evangelistic triad: What is the state of the relationship between the triune God and the human evangelist? This vital relationship touches on the crucial topic of biblical spirituality.50

Evangelistic competence for witnessing with the Spirit is the result of a maturing relationship with the triune God and is directly related to the outward expressions of this divine-human fellowship in a lifestyle of biblical spirituality. Though it has received relatively little academic attention in missiology, authentic spirituality holds great significance for evangelistic theory.51 Our aim in this final section, therefore, is briefly to consider bibli-

50 Biblical spirituality is a fuzzy term that often means different things to different people. For a helpful overview of this issue, see D. A. Carson’s “When Is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition,” in The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 555–69. In this study, we will use the term biblical spirituality as a concept parallel to Calvin’s use of piety and the Puritan’s use of godliness. In this sense, biblical spirituality is different from the mysticism and pietism of yesteryear, and radically opposed to the contemporary postmodern spirituality; see David F. Wells, Above All Earthly Pows’r: Christ in a Postmodern World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 125–76.

cal spirituality as it relates to gospel communication and the human evangelist.\textsuperscript{52} We begin, however, by considering how the underlying relationship of this spirituality is also the authentic source of evangelistic competence.

\textit{The Question of Competence}

What is the source of competence for evangelistic witness? This question is often answered by careful study of how the evangelist can better relate with the unbeliever in order to communicate more effectively the claims of the gospel. Such study is important and necessary, but it is only part of the picture.\textsuperscript{53} The other more essential part of evangelistic competence is related to the relationship between the triune God and the human evangelist, and more precisely, to the abiding presence and power of the Spirit in the evangelist’s life.

Consider the example of the apostle Peter as it unfolds for us in the biblical narrative. Before Pentecost, we see Peter’s evangelistic incompetence. Three times he denied any knowledge of his much-loved master. In the garden, Peter carelessly wields a dangerous sword, almost causing a bloody conflict. Then, while Jesus was being crucified, Peter is paralyzed by personal guilt. Finally, the long-awaited day of Pentecost had fully arrived. As promised by the ascending Christ, his followers then received power to be witnesses of him in all places. The Holy Spirit filled each of them, and then they spontaneously spoke of Christ. Now we see a different Peter wielding the “sword of the Spirit.” Now he is fearlessly preaching to a hostile audience. Now all the apostles are empowered for bold witness (cf. Acts 2:22–23). Before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostle Peter was an incompetent witness, but with the promised Spirit’s presence and power, Peter was empowered to witness of Christ with clarity and boldness.

The evangelistic turning point in the New Testament was with the coming of the promised Spirit. Before Pentecost, Jesus spoke repeatedly to his followers about the “promise of the Father,” the coming of the Spirit who would empower them for witness (Luke 24:48–49). Moreover, the emphasis accounts about a special spiritual experience that empowered evangelistic communication. For example, see D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, \textit{Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit} (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1984).

\textsuperscript{52} The spirituality here considered is that of the evangelist and not the spirituality of the unbeliever with whom he or she communicates. The sinful religiosity of the unbeliever is also important to consider, but it is radically different from the biblical spirituality of the evangelist for the essential spiritual condition and orientation are opposites.

in both Luke 24:49 and in Jesus’ parting instructions at his ascension is on the fact that his followers must wait for this special empowerment by the promised Spirit: “But you shall receive [Greek: future tense] power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be [Greek: future tense] witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8 NKJV). Hence, it is clear that without this promised Spirit something vital would be lacking in their gospel communication. However, as precisely depicted in the book of Acts, when the promised Spirit had been poured out upon the New Testament church, then the divinely ordained results quickly followed, increasing daily and multiplying beyond measure.

Therefore, from the inspired narrative, we can correctly observe that an essential component of evangelistic competence is the presence and power of the Spirit in the life of the evangelist. Indeed, the effectual power in the evangelistic encounter is not found in the evangelist’s ability to relate with and convince his or her audience of the relevance of the message, but rather—as we must repeatedly remind ourselves—true power is found in whether the sovereign Spirit chooses to witness with the evangelist and make the Word of the gospel effectual. The presence of the Spirit is not the only requirement, for the evangelist must also be a witness of Christ. He or she must be someone who has knowledge of the truth about Christ and has personally experienced the life-changing reality of this truth. However, the promised Spirit is the motivating power without which something vital would be lacking in gospel witness.

Thus, evangelistic competence is primarily and essentially the result of the Spirit’s presence and power. This presence and power of the Spirit—empowerment or unction or anointing or illumination—may on occasion be experienced individually when the sovereign Spirit chooses to work through a human witness, or it may be experienced in a greater measure at special times when the Lord chooses to work revival on a grander scale. Usually, whether individual or corporate, it is not only for the duration of evangelistic witness but also has an abiding effect on the entire life of the human evangelist and the community of believers. Indeed, this Spirit-produced competence is not only due to his occasional empowerment in witness, but it is also due to his generous gifting with abilities to understand and relate to unbelievers and his continual gracing for godly living as witnesses before the watching world. In short, evangelistic competence is the result of a maturing fellowship in the Spirit between the triune God

54 How else can we explain the fact that the Lord often chooses to work with and through the weak things of this world to confound the wise? Or, more personally, how else can we explain how the Lord has used our own feeble sinful efforts to witness of Christ to sinners, especially when we know all too well the desperate sinfulness of our own heart and thoughts? Indeed, no one has any reason to boast (1 Cor. 1:27–29).
and the human evangelist.\textsuperscript{55} This evangelistic fellowship—the second conduit of communication explained above—is the spirituality that is essential in all gospel communication.

\textit{Spirituality and Evangelism}

Biblical spirituality for evangelism is the outward expression of a maturing relationship between the triune God and the human evangelist—a spiritual relationship that also finds expression in the evangelist’s fellowship with other believers and with the unbelievers to whom he or she communicates. The apostle John beautifully depicts this multidimensional relationship in the prologue of his first epistle:

\begin{quote}
The life [of Christ] was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:2–3 NKJV)
\end{quote}

There is such a depth and richness to John’s experiential witness. Evangelistic communication involves more than a one-time exchange of gospel truth that presses for a once-for-all conversion-experience decision by the targeted audience.\textsuperscript{56} Rather, it involves a sincere desire to publicly declare and witness of the Christian experience of spiritual fellowship with the triune God,\textsuperscript{57} and it involves a sincere desire that others also would be drawn into this spiritual fellowship. Consider the following related observations.

First, the spiritual fellowship of which the apostle John speaks—the objective-subjective experience of Christ—is absolutely essential for

\textsuperscript{55} Here lies the secret of the success of the spiritual giants in the history of missions and evangelism. The specialized field of missionary history is still waiting for an extended treatment of this secret, a treatment that traces the historical thread of evangelistic dependency on the promised working of the sovereign Spirit.

\textsuperscript{56} “Could it be that our evangelistic proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ as the remedy for the sinful life has been restricted too much to the conversion experience alone? … It seems, however, too few have actually grasped the biblical concept of how the believer is to deal with sin in order that the blood of Christ may be efficacious in cleansing and keeping one in fellowship with God. This in turn may well be the reason so little powerful evangelism takes place.” Drummond, \textit{The Word of the Cross}, 519.

\textsuperscript{57} To avoid any confusion, it is necessary to note, “the Christian experience of spiritual fellowship” is never to be divorced from the objective truth of the gospel, the written Word of God. Carson states it well: “If spirituality becomes an end in itself, detached from the core, and largely without biblical or theological norms to define it and anchor it in the objective gospel, then pursuit of spirituality, however nebulously defined, will degenerate into nothing more than the pursuit of certain kinds of experience…. Spirituality must be thought about and sought after out of the matrix of core biblical theology.” Carson, \textit{The Gagging of God}, 567, emphasis original.
authentic evangelistic witness. The human evangelist communicates the truth of the gospel to unbelievers, but this truth is more than merely a verifiable fact, and even more than a seeable touchable tangible objective truth (1 John 1:1). It is also the subjective experience of living within the circumference of this truth; it is spiritual fellowship within a mystical union with the triune God in Christ. Without an experience of this spiritual fellowship, the human evangelist is not evangelizing but rather only passing on a message—much like a mechanical transmission device.

Second, this Christ-centered spirituality should motivate evangelistic witness. Our passionate goal in witness is that communication and fellowship will be restored between the triune God and the unbeliever—the fifth conduit of communication in the evangelistic trialogue. This multiplying relationship of fellowship in Christ is illustrated by the apostle John in the first chapter of his gospel: After Andrew is called by Jesus, Andrew first finds his brother Peter and says, “We have found the Messiah .... And he brought him to Jesus” (John 1:41b–42a NKJV). When Jesus calls Phillip, Phillip finds Nathaniel and says, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45 NKJV). The narrative depicts what the apostle John writes in his first epistle, “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us” as we fellowship with the triune God in Christ (1 John 1:3). This spiritual fellowship with God in Christ, sealed and guaranteed by the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14), is the mystical union by which the Spirit indwells all believers and through which Christ supplies spiritual blessings for evangelistic witness. Hence, the spontaneous witness of a Spirit-filled life that is faithfully lived in mystical union with God in Christ is the secret to the spontaneous expansion of a Spirit-filled church.

Third, this evangelistic spirituality is holistic and finds expression in Christian living. It is fascinating to note how the New Testament constantly highlights the fact that Christians are witnesses (noun) and not merely people who at times witness (verb). New Testament believers are constantly called to a lifestyle of witness (cf. 1 Peter 2:12; 3:1; 3:16; 4:14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:12; Phil. 1:27; 2:15; 1 Thess. 4:12; Titus 2:7; James 3:13) and not only to the missionary activity of verbal witness. As the apostle John explains, the authenticity and validity of our words is tested by our actions: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6–7 NKJV). Hence, when practiced in truth, biblical spirituality also has an important missionary component: living Christlike before the critical eye of the watching world.

Thus, authentic biblical spirituality for evangelism is established on the living reality of the Word of God and is the outward expression of a
maturing Spirit-filled relationship between the triune God in Christ and the human evangelist. By means of the continual gracing and gifting of the Holy Spirit, this evangelistic spirituality will find tangible expression in the ministry, character, and attitude of the human evangelist.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit in gospel communication, though largely overlooked in evangelical missiology, is of crucial importance for evangelistic theory and practice that is consistent with biblical pneumatology. Indeed, all evangelistic methods and strategies should be evaluated—at least in part—by how closely they are grounded in and developed from a biblical pneumatology. The evangelistic trialogue, as described and further defined above, provides a model that highlights the divine-human co-witness in a way that maintains this distinctive cooperation and in a way that allows precise study of its various nuances and relationships. We have looked briefly at several aspects of this crucial area in evangelistic communication theory. This article, however, is only the beginning. More attention must be given to the sovereign Spirit’s participation and influence on our evangelistic activities.

Evangelical missiology still needs a comprehensive theory of Christian witness that is grounded in and shaped by biblical pneumatology. Many missionary biographies have given attention, directly or indirectly, to the vital spirituality in gospel communication. J. H. Bavinck, and others following him, has developed the concept of evangelistic elenectics that points to the need for a compassionate confrontation of sinners. Many theologians have noted important aspects or nuances of the divine-human co-witness and the prophetic proclamation of the Word together with the Spirit. Very little attention has yet to be given to the truth that all evangelistic communication is a trialogue among the triune God, the human evangelist, and the unrepentant sinner. A comprehensive model of this trialogue is still needed, not only to guard us from contemporary abuses and errors but also to more precisely explain how the Holy Spirit aids evangelism by promoting both the relevance of the message and the competence of the messenger.