

“Illumination”

A 1986 issue of the Assemblies of God’s *Pentecostal Evangel* carried an article by Willard Cantelon that spoke of the role of the Spirit in interpreting Scripture. He had been addressing a group of ministers on the question of a pre-Tribulation rapture stance.

I opened my remarks to that gathering with the question, “What is prophecy?”

“According to Peter, ” I answered, “it is not the work of the scholar. The only part man’s mind played in the origin of prophecy was the ability to submit his mind to the Spirit and allow the Spirit to speak. ‘For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost’ (2 Peter 1:21).

“If prophecy is Spirit-given, ” I continued, “then it must be Spirit-understood. If the message of the prophets was given by the Holy Spirit and is spiritually understood, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, are we justified in asking, ‘Is it confirmed by the Spirit?’ Christ answered that question when He said He would confirm the word with signs, and one of the signs was tongues.”

The questions I was asking were being asked as much to myself as to the audience. They were totally unpremeditated.

I continued: “In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul made it clear that the three utterances of the Spirit are tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy. In the churches many utterances have been given that were inspired by the Spirit pertaining to the return of Christ.”

I then asked the audience, “Has anyone at any time heard a Spirit-inspired utterance telling us to prepare for Tribulation or Antichrist?”

Silence pervaded the auditorium. No one had ever heard this.

“Then, ” I added, “through the years we have countless messages from the Spirit related to the imminent return of Jesus. Have these stated we should be ready and expect the return of Christ at any time?”

The entire room echoed with voices lifted in praise. The Spirit had answered our question. If the Church was to go through the Tribulation, one would have to say, “I know Christ could not come today nor this year, for the Antichrist has not yet been revealed.”

At the close of that first session, the professor came to me and said, “I am glad that the Holy Spirit who has come to lead us into all truth answered the question for me.”¹

For most Pentecostal scholars that story reinforces their consternation over Pentecostal pop-theology; for many fellow evangelicals that story confirms their worst fears about Pentecostals, period. Though Cantelon’s sentiments were published in a house organ of the Assemblies of God, they are not generally held among Pentecostals even at the lay level—let alone at the academic level. In fact an edition of that same magazine that came out during the final writing of this chapter published these words from the denomination’s General Superintendent, which flatly contradict Cantelon’s view: “The prophetic gift is not to be used to interpret the Scriptures. Prophecy does not judge Scripture, but rather is judged *by* Scripture.”²

¹Willard Cantelon, “Good News from Sodom, ” *Pentecostal Evangel* (Nov. 2, 1986), p. 5.

²G. Raymond Carlson, “The Role of the Prophet Today, ” *Pentecostal Evangel* (Aug. 5, 1990), p. 5.

I. Historical Theology of 'Illumination'

A. Illumination: Historical Developments

The early church's confusion about illumination was twofold: *First*, the church usurped the role of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the text; *second*, the spiritual meaning of Scripture began to be identified with a *sensus plenior* that motivated allegorizers. Louis Berkhof notes the historical tension in Roman Catholic thought on the first confusion: "Theoretically, even the Church of Rome held that only the Holy Spirit can give one absolute certainty respecting the truth of revelation, but in practice there was a tendency to replace the testimony of the Holy Spirit by the testimony of the Church."³ Francis Martin noted the dynamic of this movement, saying the early theologians respected the text but accented understanding "the reality about which the text was speaking."

For many of the great Fathers of the church, especially in their homilies to the people, the Sacred Text was more a means to be employed than an object to be studied. In their exposition of the text, they sought to pass on an understanding and a spiritual grasp of the great work of redemption. They sought out the treasures of the text in order to bring people in living contact with the reality and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the centuries went on, however, the greatness of the early masters gave way to a certain repetitive style which built upon the insights of the great Fathers but which in many cases seems to have lost its own living contact with the realities about which the texts were speaking.⁴

This, in turn, meant that authoritative certainty came to be located in the interpreting community rather than in the Holy Spirit's illumination of the text. On the one hand, Jerome could say, "Even if he does not stray from the Church, anyone who... understands the Scripture otherwise than in the *sense* demanded by *the Holy Spirit in whom it was written* can be called a heretic."⁵ On the other hand, Origen's notes about the necessity of illumination strictly tied together the Church's interpretation and its meaning. Lubac assesses Origen's position: "Only the Church understands the Scriptures: the Church, in other words, this portion of humanity that is converted to the Lord: 'Ecclesia ad Deum conversæ ablatum est velamen.'⁶ The spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures is the interpretation 'that the Spirit gives to the Church.'⁷ Lubac continues, democratizing the experience of illumination, "each person can make this his own to the extent that he participates in this movement of conversion of the Church."⁸ Origen's phrase "only the Church understands the Scriptures" had a latent abuse potential, which eventually resulted in the interpretive tyranny of the Roman Church.

The Reformers rallied around *sola Scriptura* as their bulwark against the interpretive tyranny of Rome on the one hand and against the interpretive anarchy of the Radical Reforma-

³Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932; Baker reprint, 1979), p. 183.

⁴Francis Martin, "Spirit and Flesh in the Doing of Theology," Society for Pentecostal Studies Papers [SPS Papers] (1985), p. J3.

⁵Ignace de la Potterie, S.J. "Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in which It was Written (*Dei Verbum* 12c)," trans. Leslie Wearne, in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years after (1962–1987)*, 3 vols., ed. R. Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988), 1:229; citing Jerome, *In Gal.*, 5:19-21 (PL 26.445A-B).

⁶De la Potterie, 1.226; citing Origen, *In Cant.*, 3 (GCS, 8:204-5).

⁷De la Potterie, 1.226; citing Henri de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit. L'intelligence de l'Encriure d'après Origène*, Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier, 1950), p. 193.

⁸De la Potterie, 1.226; citing H. de Lubac, p. 193.

tion on the other. In so doing, they emphasized the necessity of illumination. Martin Luther said, “No one on earth will understand Scripture or even the slightest thing in Scripture without the Holy Spirit,”⁹ and John Calvin wrote on 1 Cor 1:20:

Both these points are to be observed with care, that knowledge of all academic disciplines is mere smoke where the heavenly wisdom of Christ is lacking, and that a man on his own with all his wits is as incapable of understanding the mysteries of God as an ass is unsuited for music.¹⁰

The seventeenth century Puritan divine John Owen wrote what is still the finest work to date on illumination.¹¹ He fought against Roman interpretive tyranny, Radical Reformation interpretive anarchy, and scholarly interpretive hubris. He lamented Rome’s attempt to seize control of the Scriptures by asserting its autonomy with respect to its interpretation. At the same time he insisted that we need no “new divine *afflations*, or immediate *prophetic inspirations*” to understand the Scriptures.¹² Owen reproached enthusiasts for their neglect of the written word, insisting that their claim to rely on the Spirit had become a “bog of many vain imaginations and corrupt opinions.” Barring their return to the law, the prophets, and the apostles, the enthusiasts’ inner light produced only stark darkness.¹³ Against the school men, he wrote, “*There is an especial work of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, communicating spiritual wisdom, light and understanding unto them, necessary unto their discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word, and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein.*”¹⁴

Historians of early Pentecostalism have noted an initially ambivalent assessment of the role of ‘revelations’ in formulating doctrine. Eugene Hastie described a Des Moines Bible school of 1911 this way:

The lessons began with the beginning of the gospel of St. John, and when the school closed only a little more than the entire book had been covered. Brother Opperman himself directed the services and occasionally Brother Roselli [*sic*] would fluently speak out in tongues, which would be interpreted by Brother Anderson. These messages would have some bearing upon the Scripture in question, and would be reverently regarded by the people as the voice of God through the Holy Ghost.¹⁵

This openness to interpretation by “revelation” withered in the face of “prophetic” perversions. For example, Pentecostal Unitarianism was promoted by appeal to new revelation. Though

⁹Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Hermeneutical Significance of 1 Cor 2:6-16,” trans. C. Brown, in *Tradition & Interpretation in the NT*, pp. 328-47. Edited by G. Hawthorne and O. Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1987), p. 328; citing Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (1525), WA 18:609, 11-12, cf. *Luther’s Works*. 56 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972. 33:29-35.

¹⁰Stuhlmacher, p. 329; quoting Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini in omnes Paul Apostoli Epistolas atque etiam in Epistolam ad Hebraeos Commentarii*. Ed. A. Tholuck. Halle, 1831, 1:232; cf. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960.

¹¹John Owen, “Συνεσις Πνευματικη, the Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurances Therein; and A Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures with the External Means of the Interpretation of Them,” *Works*, 24 vols. (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1678), 4:118-234.

¹²Ibid., 4:122-25.

¹³Ibid., 4:158-59.

¹⁴Ibid., 4:125-26.

¹⁵William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), p. 88; quoting Eugene Hastie, *History of the West Central District Council of the Assemblies of God* (Fort Dodge, Iowa: Walterick Printing Co., 1948), p. 31.

such an appeal to “revelation” exercised compelling influence early on, William Menzies notes that its force waned: “Gradually, however, sentiment crystallized among more and more of the Assemblies of God brethren across the country that such a remarkable revelation seemed to be based more on subjective feelings than on the objective revelation of the Word of God written.”¹⁶ Carl Brumback records a typical interchange over this “Oneness message.”¹⁷

Howard Goss admonished E. L. Newby in Wichita Falls, Texas: “Be careful what you do about this wonderful truth. Don’t turn it down finally, or you will miss God.”

“But where is it in the Word?” inquired Newby.

“Oh, you’ll never get this by studying it out like some other doctrine. This comes by ‘revelation,’ ” replied Goss.¹⁸

Pentecostals have generally agreed with Newby’s response: “Well, frankly, I’m not interested.... If you can’t prove it in the Word, if it is not there plain and simple, I’d distrust any ‘revelation’ that communicated it. It’s too farfetched for me.”¹⁹

B. Illumination: Contemporary Theology

Discussions on illumination have reached a crisis in contemporary theology. The charismatic wing of Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism has initiated new popular interest in illumination. At the scholarly level René Latourelle, Ignace de la Potterie, Francis Martin, and George Martin have addressed the issue, offering analysis, criticism, and advice. Latourelle traces the expressions of the fathers and the recent councils on illumination and calls for renewed attention to the doctrine:

The fathers of the Church, in their turn, re-emphasize these expressions of Scripture. We can even say that there is, among them, a real tradition of the interior teacher. The documents of the Church, speaking of the inner attraction which invites us to believe the Gospel message, do not use the term revelation. The Council of Orange speaks of an “illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which gives us a sweetness of adherence and belief in the truth” (D 180). This expression is taken up by the First Vatican Council (D 1791). The Council of Trent speaks of a grace which “stirs us” (D 798), of an “illumination” through which God “touches the human heart, ” “stirs it up, ” “calls it” (D 797, 814). The Vatican Council speaks of an inspiration of grace (D 1789), of an “aid” which comes from on high. God, through His grace, “stirs up” those who are looking for the truth (D 1794). This grace accompanies the preaching of the Gospel message (D 180), the external Word (D 798).²⁰

Ignace de la Potterie deplores the neglect of the doctrine in Roman Catholic circles—even after Vatican II: He asks, “Can we speak of a ‘reception’ of the principle of Vatican II

¹⁶Menzies, p. 117.

¹⁷Most Pentecostal denominations soundly rejected this Pentecostal form of Unitarianism. For a contemporary Pentecostal defense of that heresy, see David K. Bernard, “The Oneness View of Jesus,” SPS Papers (1989).

¹⁸Carl Brumback, *Suddenly... From Heaven* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), p. 202; citing E. L. Newby, Assemblies of God District Superintendent of Texas (1930–37), interview with Brumback in Fort Worth, September 4, 1959.

¹⁹Brumback, p. 202.

²⁰René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), pp. 380-81.

according to which we should ‘interpret sacred Scripture *in the Spirit* in which it was written’?.” He answers his own question: “To a great extent we must answer in the negative.”²¹

Two Roman Catholic scholars, Francis Martin and George Martin, have turned their attention to illumination and made significant contributions. George Martin has written what William Kurz calls “a masterful introduction to the Vatican II approach, written for the layperson.”²² It is indeed a useful little handbook; even Bruce Waltke, an evangelical scholar, finds the first ninety-two pages of it helpful.²³ Encouraging his audience to read the Bible in spite of its “inexhaustible depths,” Martin says, “We must not be overwhelmed by what we do not know about Scripture; we should be consoled that God has given us Scripture as a means of growing in faith, in hope, in love, in union with him.”²⁴

Francis Martin’s work is the most substantial of the contributions from contemporary Roman Catholics, but it is not easily accessible.²⁵ He calls for a “critical hermeneutics of the Spirit,” which he believes “can and should be the distinctive role of pentecostal charismatic theology in the domain of biblical exegesis.”²⁶ He defines that in terms of the life lived “according to the Spirit,” saying, “the mind is being transformed so that the person knows himself to be not only thinking about divine things but in living touch with them. This is the meaning of revelation.”²⁷ He sets this over against hermeneutics that is “characterized by the flesh.”

The Spirit, however, is the only one who can confer upon us a revelation so that we are able not only to explain the text but also to understand it, that is, to come into touch with the realities about which the text is speaking. There is meant to be a harmonious balance between the assiduous application of our minds to the writings which God has given to us and a submission of our minds to that work of the Holy Spirit which alone can make us spiritual men.... without a deep submission of our own human activity to the work of the Holy Spirit, we run the risk of being always dominated, subtly or overtly, by the self-centeredness and self-concern which is the work of the flesh.²⁸

Martin lists various ways that the “work of the flesh” dominates exegesis, noting pride, sloth, and distorted presuppositions. About pride, he says,

We can see this ‘corinthian’ syndrome in many scholars who are more excited about their own insights than they are about the Gospel itself. In how many articles and university lectures do we see this attitude operative, by which people are vaunting their own notions and competing with the no-

²¹de la Potterie, 1.255.

²²William S. Kurz, S.J., “Inspiration and the Origins of the New Testament,” in *Scripture and the Charismatic Renewal*, Proceedings of the Milwaukee Symposium, ed. George Martin (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1979), p. 29.

²³Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 12 cassettes (Grand Rapids: Institute of Theological Studies, 1988), lecture 17.

²⁴George Martin, *Reading Scripture as the Word of God: Practical Approaches and Attitudes* (Ann Arbor: Word of Life, 1975), pp. 5-6. Martin’s work comprises two parts. Part 1: Reading Scripture, and Part 2: The Word of God. Though his work in the latter part is of little use, Martin’s first section deals with the practical considerations of Bible study: translations, reference works, the relation of prayer to Bible study, applying the Scriptures to one’s own situation, etc.

²⁵Francis Martin, “Spirit and Flesh in the Doing of Theology,” SPS Papers (1985), pp. J1-J42. *Pneuma*, the society’s journal, has not chosen to publish this excellent paper, even though it is clearly that society’s most worthwhile contribution to this discussion.

²⁶Ibid., p. J1.

²⁷Ibid., p. J7; it would be better to call it “the meaning of illumination.”

²⁸Ibid., pp. J1-J2.

tions of others even in matters that pertain to the divine work of salvation. This is fleshly thinking about divine realities.²⁹

He labels sloth as a characteristic of the hermeneutics of the flesh, saying,

Another way the flesh impedes our understanding of the text is simply sloth. When we follow the instincts of the flesh, we are more interested in those things which are available to us without great work or without a profound submission to reality. We find sentimental books about religion or even newspapers more interesting and more palatable to the taste of our mind, and we remain in a slothful state.... Such a person is interested in easy answers. He is content with 'second hand theology.' Interesting remarks and clever insights on the part of others are easily repeated by him, though he has no understanding of what they mean.³⁰

When he speaks of "the third and most profound way in which the flesh inhibits our understanding of the text," he refers to "prejudice."³¹ He notes that there is no such thing as presuppositionless exegesis, and the flesh supplies the presuppositions of the unregenerate. Even among believers, there is the danger of "reading the text with 'selective inattention.'"³² He concludes discussion of fleshly presuppositions with a warning that a hermeneutic of the Spirit is not a license to avoid the rigorous labor required in critical exegesis; the renewed mind will apply itself to the Scriptures assiduously.

Does all of this mean, then, that there is no room for the vigorous application of one's mind according to the laws of human communication? No, it means exactly the opposite. In this, as in everything, the redeeming work of Jesus Christ has restored us to our true humanity. Because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we are freed from our prejudice and also able to institute a thoroughgoing critical reflection on our approach to the Sacred Text.³³

Other contemporary scholars are turning their attention to illumination, with scholars like Peter Stuhlmacher and Bruce Waltke calling for renewed attention to the matter. Stuhlmacher bemoans the lack of attention to the hermeneutical implications of 1 Cor 2:6-16.³⁴ In evangelical circles Bruce Waltke has noticed a decline in interest in illumination since the Reformation and the Puritans and expresses concern that since John Owen's 1678 "masterful treatise," a neglect of the doctrine has worsened with few interruptions.³⁵ Waltke finds this "puzzling" and suggests, "Perhaps evangelicals have tended to downplay the spiritual understanding because they have forgotten that the aim of Christian hermeneutics is the knowledge of God."³⁶

²⁹Ibid., pp. J10-J11.

³⁰Ibid., p. J12.

³¹Ibid., p. J12. Martin defines "prejudice," by reference to *prae iudicium*, as preunderstanding, or presuppositions (p. J32). He treats the philosophical and historical-critical presuppositions of post-Enlightenment thought, and refers to the contemporary tendency to engage in ideological interpretation, such as more feminists hermeneutics and some sociological approaches to the Bible (p. J22).

³²Ibid., p. J14.

³³Ibid., p. J32.

³⁴Stuhlmacher, pp. 328-47. He notes only two modern works that have dealt seriously with it: Hans Weder, *Das Kreuz Jesu beim Paulus* (1981) and Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (1987).

³⁵Waltke, *Proverbs*, lecture 17.

³⁶Waltke, "Hermeneutics and the Spiritual Life," *Crux* 23 (1987) 6-7. See also Herbert Jacobsen, "On the Limitation of Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, pp. 217-237, eds., Samuel J. Schultz, and Morris Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976), p. 224.

The Pentecostal scene is also confused about illumination. Cantelon's contemporary recall of prophecy as an interpretive tool serves as a grim reminder that the early excesses linger at the popular level, and of late the 'Kingdom Now' movement has taken it all to new extremes.³⁷ Pentecostals should bring the issues of revelation and illumination to the top of the agenda. Earl Paulk, a key spokesman for 'Kingdom Now' thought, sounds Mormon-like themes when he complains, "We wave our Bibles and cry, 'This is the Word of God.' Indeed the Bible is God's Word, but through prophets, the Holy Spirit also brings revelation to this generation that is equally God's Word."³⁸ This appeal to prophetic utterances to supplement a dead-letter Bible sounds quite like Joseph Smith defending his own revelations: "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible" (2 Nephi 29:3-10).³⁹ Paulk even thinks of Mormons as "brothers and sisters in the faith" and sides with them over against his detractors: "for so long we have said, ... 'Why don't the Mormons change?' Perhaps we should be the ones to change."⁴⁰ He even categorically insists, "The prophet is not a method God uses; but in fact is the only method He uses to speak to this generation."⁴¹ He asks, "Why can't holy men in our day get this same inspiration from God? Is what we say less important than God's Word spoken by holy men of old?"⁴²

This is not just a problem isolated in pop-theology; at the scholarly level too, there are problems. The 1989 agenda at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) serves as a sobering sign of the problems in defining a Pentecostal understanding of illumination.⁴³ Jackie and Cheryl Johns refer to Francis Martin's claim that "exegesis of the Spirit" is the only way to understand and appropriate Scripture.⁴⁴ Loading up a word study of *ἡγε* and *γνώσκω*, they approve Bultmann's assertion: "The OT usage is much broader than the Greek, and the element of objective verification is less prominent than that of detecting or feeling by learning or by experience."⁴⁵ Because they want Bultmann's dynamic sense of knowledge they end up agreeing with him when he says, "Christian knowledge is not a fixed possession but de-

³⁷On the Assemblies of God reaction to this movement, see the white paper, "Kingdom Now Doctrines Which Differ from Assemblies of God Teaching," *Paraclete* 24.3 (Summer 1990) 19-24; for analysis of the history of the movement, see Gordon Anderson, "Kingdom Now Theology: A Look at Its Roots and Branches," *Paraclete* 24.3 (Summer 1990) 1-11. Anderson correctly identifies 'Kingdom Now' as a Restorationist movement depending heavily on the thought of the Reconstructionists, though he has a poor understanding of the Reconstructionist movement itself.

³⁸Paulk, *The Wounded Body of Christ* (Atlanta: K. Dimensions, 1985 edition), p. 2.

³⁹Cited in Philip L. Barlow, "Before Mormonism: Joseph Smith's Use of the Bible," *JAAR* 57.4 (1990) 739-71. esp. 762. This passage from Nephi bemoans the fact that many "Gentiles" will reject the Book of Mormon. Barlow indicates that Mormonism did not arise as an intentional departure from the Bible but rather as result of a Bible tradition supplemented and interpreted by additions to the canon.

⁴⁰Earl Paulk, *Unity of Faith* (Decatur, GA: Chapel Hill Harvester Church, n.d.), p. 4; quoted in *The Agony of Deceit*, ed. Michael Horton (Chicago: Moody, 1990), p. 278.

⁴¹Paulk, *The Wounded Body of Christ*, p. 2.

⁴²Paulk, *Satan Unmasked* (Atlanta: K Dimensions, 1984), p. 132.

⁴³SPS Papers (1989).

⁴⁴Jackie D. Johns, and Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Yielding to the Spirit: A Pentecostal Approach to Bible Study," SPS Papers (1989); citing Francis Martin, "Spirit and Flesh in the Doing of Theology," SPS Papers (1985). The following critique of the Johns' work should not be extended to include Francis Martin's excellent paper, the balance of which the Johns fail to convey.

⁴⁵Johns, p. H-5; citing R. Bultmann, "Γινώσκω," *TDNT* 1.687 [sic], correct reference is *TDNT* 1.697. For their authority on *ἡγε*, they cite Groom, *Christian Religious Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 141.

velops in the life of the Christian as lasting obedience and reflection.”⁴⁶ Bultmann’s statements own a certain degree of formal validity, but they enjoy material validity only if they are centered around the absolute authority of the canon of Scripture. The Johns, however, assert that the covenant community is the “context for knowing”; and the nature of this covenant community is determined not so much by the Scriptures, as the community’s covenantal document, as by “individual experiences” in the ongoing history of the “Community of the Spirit.” They say,

He dwells in the midst of his people so that the church, being grounded in covenant relations, operates within an epistemology not of detachment and manipulation (which is a result of operating only with facts and principles) but rather of *participation and accountability*. The Community of the Spirit gives a corporate history to the knowing of God and it judges and is judged by individual experiences. There is therefore the avoidance of privatized subjectivism on the one hand and totalitarian objectivism on the other.⁴⁷

The Johns appear to be working with a merely existentialist personalism placed over against what they would consider to be bad-faith objectification of dogma:

In the Community of the Spirit there is no room for private knowledge as expressed in the slogan “one truth for you, another for me, and never mind the difference.” Neither is there room for “objectivist tyranny” in which concern for *The Truth* gives rise to the slogan “there is one truth for me, the same for you, and I mind very much the difference” (H-11).

Since their final note about “objectivist tyranny” takes away what they asserted in the first about “private knowledge,” they end up with a community-based meaning. They have replaced “objectivist tyranny” with a tyranny of the community’s interpretation. That basis, in turn, finds its source in “individual experience,” so they really are in vicious circle that perpetually reverts to the “private knowledge” they formally reject. As a result, it almost sounds like the Johns would have to disagree with Paul, who held out one truth, called all other messages a delusion that would damn you, and minded very much the difference: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal 1:8-9).

At that same SPS meeting, Hollis Gause offered five “propositions” for discussion.⁴⁸ The first proposition was this: “Pentecostalism offers a theology of worship as an alternative to either a theology of the Word or theology of experience. This does not repudiate either, but it offers worship as the ballast between these alternatives.”⁴⁹ His third proposition read, “Worship is a union of Persons—the Worshiped and the worshiper. This union of persons also extends by the Holy Spirit to incorporate fellow worshipers. The worshiper responds to the movement, will and actions of the Holy Spirit. The congregation of worshipers moves in worship as one body, which is in Christ (Acts 4:23–25 [sic]).”⁵⁰ This sounds more like *mystical* union than *covenantal* union with Christ, and since Gause operates with both an existentialist meaning and a mystical relationship with God, dogma or any other description of fixed truth is

⁴⁶Johns, p. H-6; citing Bultmann, “Τὴν ὁσκόω,” *TDNT* 1:707.

⁴⁷Johns, p. H-10.

⁴⁸Hollis Gause, “Word, Spirit, and Worship (John 1:1–14),” *SPS Papers* (1989). Gause is Professor of New Testament and Theological Studies, Church of God Theological Studies, Cleveland, Tennessee.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. D-14. The typical evangelical would probably assert that there is only sound dogma or bad dogma, and that one’s experience and worship will be either sound or bad depending on one’s theology of the Word.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. D-15.

beside the point. That, in turn, makes illumination beside the point because there is nothing fixed to understand. This is the fate that illumination endures at the hands of any system that moves away from the propositional value of Scripture to a merely emotive existential value.

II. Biblical Theology of 'Illumination'

Both the nature of Scripture itself and the nature of believers require of us illumination if we are rightly to understand God's word. The same one who inspires also illuminates, making clear his own meaning to the reader. On the one hand, believers must avoid the danger of noetic nihilism; illumination is promised. On the other hand, believers must avoid the danger of noetic hubris; "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Cor 13:12).

Human noetic limits existed from the beginning of creation. The clear record of Scripture is that man, from the start, was created as a dependent being subject to limits that were not his to understand and ratify but only his to obey. When God says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9), he defines an epistemological gap that existed even apart from humanity's fall into sin. Howard Ervin notes this:

Even the new birth does not erase the boundary between the Creator and the creature. However, the conditions for hearing and understanding the Word are now present for we become by grace what He is by nature. But, and it is a large *but*, we can never transgress the limits of our creaturehood. Even though the conditions for hearing and understanding are now present, that does not automatically insure our understanding the divine address. The qualitative distance between the Creator and the creature, although it is bridged, is not erased.⁵¹

It is, however, the noetic effects of the Fall that most forcefully press on us the necessity of illumination to understand God's Word. Owen speaks of this as "the *natural vanity and darkness with which the minds of all men are depraved.*"⁵² Paul defined the situation, saying, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4).

A. Illumination: Old Testament (OT)

Though we tend to think of illumination as a work of the Spirit initiated under the New Covenant, the Scriptures delineate a degree of realized illumination in the OT itself. The teacher in Proverbs 2:1-6 notes the source, means, and goal of illumination. The source is only God, for "the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (v 6). The teacher describes the means that the student should use: One should acknowledge divine authority and "accept my words" (v 1a). You should memorize Scripture and so "store up my commands within you" (v 1b). One should study with discipline, "turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding" (v 2). This is not mere intellectual pursuit, which prompts God to give wisdom; the believer must pray and "call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding" (v 3). One should value wisdom and "look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure" (v 4). The goal of this prayerful and disciplined quest for illumination was that the student might "understand the fear of the LORD and the knowledge of God" (v 5).

We have every reason to believe this exhortation was based on God's real determination to answer these prayerful searches. The psalmist cried, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps 119:18), and he went on to celebrate the Word as "a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (v 105). In the wilderness, Moses had wondered at God's giv-

⁵¹Howard M. Ervin, "Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option," *Pneuma* 3.2 (1981) 17.

⁵²Owen, 4:176.

ing of the law. Telling the people to observe these laws, he said, “this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut 4:6). In connection with his exhortation to observe the laws, Moses exclaimed, “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” (v 7).

Above this realized illumination, key OT expressions looked forward to a new level of illumination under the new covenant. Isaiah foretold a day when “all your sons will be taught by the LORD” (Isa 54:13, LXX [cf. John 6:45]). Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant by which God said, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.... No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer 31:33-34). Interestingly, Calvin links this passage with Joel 2:28-32, saying,

But the Prophet means, that those who are the least or the lowest among God’s people shall be endowed with so much light of knowledge that they will be almost like teachers. To the same purpose is the prophecy of Joel, “Prophecy shall your sons, your daughters shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Joel ii.28). He promises that there would be everywhere prophets and teachers, because the grace of God would be at that day more abundant; and these things ought everywhere to be understood comparatively.⁵³

B. Illumination: New Testament (NT)

It is with the NT that these expectations find fulfillment among the people of God. It is, therefore, the NT that provides the richest descriptions of illumination’s dynamic. On the one hand, the NT focuses on the nature of Scripture as divinely authored and illuminated, on the wisdom of the self-revealing God. On the other hand, the NT focuses on the nature of man as image and likeness of God but fallen and in need of illuminating regeneration.

1. The Nature of Scripture

The Scriptures are divine, and it is the author who makes their meaning clear to the faithful reader: the revealer is the illuminator. In the work of illumination, the triune godhead opens the Scriptures to believers. This does not mean the persons of the godhead work together, complementing basically disparate modes of revelation and hermeneutics,⁵⁴ it means the godhead in perfect union sheds light on the Scriptures. The christological and pneumatological elements are especially visible in the Bible’s teaching on illumination, but the Father is also involved; consequently, the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Eph. 1:17).

The christological role in illumination was twofold: Jesus Christ illuminated Scripture as its author-teacher, but also as its focus and fulfillment. The Word made flesh repeatedly declared his authoritative interpretation of Scripture, and he began his ministry saying, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). His expression, “You have heard that it

⁵³John Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 4:137.

⁵⁴Randall Bush says, “The linear hermeneutic belongs more the revelation of God as Father.... It is a revelation which, because of its nature as event, is not repeatable.... The revelation of the Spirit, in contrast, but not in contradiction to the linear mode, is a more circular revelation.... At the center of Scripture stands the mystery of the person and work of the divine-human Christ, who, as the Word, is the communicative link between the two poles of external and internal revelation. Because he is human and divine, he bridges the gap between the modes of circularity and linearity, between the human and the divine, and between the relative and the absolute” (“The Hermeneutical Spiral and the Revelation of God as Trinity,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 [1987] 25-26).

was said.... But I tell you...” (Matt 5), was surely an assertion of an illuminator’s lordship over Scripture interpretation. He wrestled the control of interpretation away from the legal experts, saying, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!” (Mark 7:8). The upshot of this was that the people recognized his interpretive authority, noting that this illuminator “taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:22).

Luke 24 recounts a key occasion of christological fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise, “all your sons will be taught by the LORD” (Isa 54:13). Here, after his resurrection, Jesus instructed the disciples in christological hermeneutics, telling them how to read the OT, indeed, how it should have been read all along (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). I. H. Marshall refers to διαρμηνεύω (v 27) and claims, “The verb signifies that the speaker chose out those passages which might be regarded as ‘messianic’ and then proceeded to show how they should be understood, so that they could now ‘speak’ to the disciples.”⁵⁵ More probably the instruction was *inclusive* rather than *exclusive*; the verb does not denote selection, and the context points to global understanding. Jesus was establishing how all of the OT anticipated him, rather than selecting messianic proof texts. The emphasis is expansive: “he explained to them what was said *in all the Scriptures* concerning himself” (v 27) and specified it in comprehensive terms as being “written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (v 44). Pointing to “the comprehensive nature of Jesus’ interpretation, i.e. his use of all parts of the canon without discrimination,” Sven Soderland indicates that the result of this hermeneutics lesson was general illumination about the whole of Scripture.⁵⁶ It was not just a new awareness concerning specific messianic texts: “he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (v 45). This was a lesson in the proper way to read the *whole* Bible.

Pneumatological fulfillment of the promise of illumination provides most of the NT data on the doctrine. When Paul prays to the Father, he prays that the Ephesians might be granted “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17–19a), indicating that the dynamic of inspiration is the dynamic of illumination—the Holy Spirit. The danger of equating general illumination of the believer with canonical revelation should not deter us from reading Paul’s prayer as an expression of hope that God would send the Spirit to *reveal* the message of Scripture.

Paul prayed for a specific fulfillment among the Ephesians of what Jesus promised his followers: “another Counselor to be with you forever” (John 14:16) who would “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Spirit would come as the permanent Paraclete, revealing all truth by delivering the apostolic tradition and illuminating that truth to all believers. The Reformed tradition generally refers this only to the apostolic role in receiving and transmitting canonical revelation by inspiration. This emphasis is proper, but some consideration should be given to the fulfillment of this promise by illumination (see below).

Any talk of the necessity of illumination must deal with the possibility of false knowledge, even of the Scriptures. It is possible to affect knowledge but actually know nothing of God, to stockpile propositional truth about God that only damns the reader. Owen notes that one can have an expertise that comprises only speculative notions of truth, the knowledge that “puffs up” (1Cor 8:1), but this only provokes proud commentary on religion. He insists that one needs a saving acknowledgment of the truth that subjects the soul to the will of God. “Men may have a knowledge of words, and the meaning of propositions in the Scripture, who

⁵⁵I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 897.

⁵⁶Sven Soderlund, “Burning Hearts and Open Minds: Exposition on the Emmaus Road,” *Crux* 23 (1987) 2-4.

have no knowledge of the things themselves designed in them.” The fullest meaning of Scripture is not open to merely intellectual investigation, because the knowledge obtained by merely natural reason might inform the mind but not illuminate or transform it. He denies that understanding gained by natural means can give “the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God” (Col 2:2b); it does not enable men to trust in God, adhering to him firmly in love. The psalmist says, “Those who know your name will trust in you” (Ps 9:10); but “what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim 6:20) will generate only disputations and oppositions to real spiritual truth.⁵⁷

The Holy Spirit binds meaning and application tightly together. Meaning without a view to application is an abstraction that can in fact be *untrue*. For example, Job’s friends said many things formally correct about God, and Job’s language causes our discomfort when we read the book; even so, God told Job’s friends, “You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7, 8). This dynamic might best be expressed by noting the Scriptural link between existential meaning and appropriate situational considerations. “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11); however, even a forceful expression of truth, such as a proverb, may be as ineffectual as “a lame man’s legs,” without functional value. In fact, it may be positively damaging, as dangerous as “a thornbush in a drunkard’s hand” (Prov 26:7, 9). Words that are functionally insignificant are actually without meaning, even if one isolates meaning entirely in authorial intent. If the author intends that “the holy Scriptures” are “to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15) but they fail in that purpose, they are functionally meaningless; those that read them in any other way fail to grasp the meaning and may even be grasping the thornbush.

2. *Nature of Believers*

Believers have reason for optimism in the search for truth. On the one hand, believers should recognize the cognitive limits under which they still work; on the other hand, they should not lapse into a noetic nihilism that fails to account for God’s grant of illumination. Believers are not omniscient gods; however, they “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10).

The nature of Scripture demands that it be read with illumination, so also the nature of believers requires it: there are noetic limits, even for believers. Regeneration does not erase the Creator-Creature distinction or immediately turn back the repercussions of the Fall. Seeking to transcend human epistemological finitude is seeking to be gods. Despite the Mormon-like claims of “Kingdom Now” adherents, we are men not gods,⁵⁸ and despite their crass triumphalism, we live as groaning sons in a groaning creation (Rom 8:22, 23). Noetic limits necessitate illumination even with respect to our prayer life; we do not even know “what we ought to pray for” (v 26). Even so, we are not shut up to noetic nihilism. As solace for our noetic breakdown in prayer, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (vv 26, 27). As respite from our noetic fail-

⁵⁷Owen, 4:155-58.

⁵⁸Earl Paulk says, “Just as dogs have puppies and cats have kittens, so God has little gods. Seed remains true to its nature, bearing its own kind. When God said, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ he created us as little gods, but we have trouble comprehending this truth. We see ourselves as ‘little people’ with very little power and dominion. Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the kingdom of God” (*Satan Unmasked*, pp. 96-97). Paulk serves as an apostle of Satan spewing his garbage and calling it gospel, doing the work of an antichrist and earning for himself the prophets’ condemnation of usurper gods: “In the pride of your heart you say, ‘I am a god....’ But you are a man and not a god” (Ezek 28:1-10, esp. v 2; cf. Isa 14:4-23).

ure to understand revelation, God gives believers “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17), “expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:13), and so guiding believers “into all truth” (John 16:13).

a) Danger of noetic nihilism

God gives his children the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit. The NT discusses this under a variety of terms, all of which have a strong pneumatological focus. When Jesus was going to depart, he promised his disciples that his temporary presence with them would be replaced by the presence of the permanent Paraclete (John 14:16). As the permanent Paraclete the Spirit would illumine believers. Jesus promised, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13). The first question is whether this promise pertains only to the Apostles or also to the general believer throughout the Church age. The prevalent evangelical position is that it is an apostolic promise fulfilled in their reception and transmission of the remainder of the canon of Scripture. For example, Walter Kaiser omits it from a list of passages concerning the promise of the Spirit for the general believer, applying it only to the apostolic function of receiving and transmitting canonical revelation.

We have deliberately deleted from this list John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15, for these promises of the Holy Spirit’s coming were solely directed to those disciples whose distinctive work it would be to write the NT. The Spirit would “bring to their remembrance all that [Jesus] had said, ” and they would be witnesses to Christ since they “had been with [him] from the beginning [of his earthly ministry]”. These disciples would teach doctrine (“what is mine”), future events and past deeds. Thus only these men were promised the Spirit’s leading them into revelational truth.⁵⁹

Various scholars have disagreed that this pertains only to the apostolic transmission of canonical revelation. Raymond Brown doubts that this refers to new revelation at all, even though the reference is to “what is yet to come.”⁶⁰ John Owen’s disagreement is, however, more substantial. He notes that the tenor of the whole section of John is the promise of a permanent Paraclete; therefore, Owen regards the isolation of this aspect of his ministry to the apostolic period as misguided.

The promises concerning the mission of the Holy Spirit in these chapters of the Gospel, xiv.xv.xvi., are not to be confined to the apostles, nor unto the first age or ages of the church. To do so is expressly contradictory unto the discourse and whole design of our Lord Jesus Christ unto that purpose; for he promiseth him in opposition unto his own temporary abode in the world, namely, that this of the Spirit should be forever, chap. xiv 16, —that is, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, Matt. xxviii. 20, unto the consummation of the whole state of the church here below.⁶¹

Owen continues, saying this refers not to external guidance into the truth by objective revelation; such revelations are not granted to all to whom this promise is made. Instead he refers this promise to the internal teaching of the Holy Spirit giving understanding of the mind of God as seen in revealed truth. He says, it is the same with the promise that “they shall be taught of God” and notes that the work of the Spirit to “guide you into all truth” (ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάση) is the work that the eunuch needed. Philip asked whether he unders-

⁵⁹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “The Promise of God and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:16-21, ” in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, eds. Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 117.

⁶⁰Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, AB 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), p. 716.

⁶¹Owen, 4:143.

took his reading in Isaiah, and he replied, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me (ἐὰν μὴ τις ὀδηγήσῃ με)?” (Acts 8:31). Pentecostals will generally agree with Owen’s stance on this passage.

Though 1 Cor 2:10-16 has suffered widespread mystical abuse, it is a key passage for outlining a proper understanding of the necessity, source, and nature of illumination. A prominent question here is whether this passage refers to some sort of spiritual elitism. E. Earle Ellis comes close to saying this:

The prophetic character of the pneumatics is confirmed in the striking passage, 1 Cor 2, 6–16. As they are in 1 Cor 14, the pneumatics here (1) are distinguished from the believers generally. (2) They are both the recipients and the mediators of revelation, “the wisdom of God in a mystery, ” wisdom that had been hidden.⁶²

Ellis further says,

These passages—Rom 1, 11 f., 1Cor 2, 6–16, and 1Cor 14—give us a glimpse into the functioning of a certain class of charismatics, the pneumatics with their “spiritual” gifts. Such persons were empowered to speak τῷ πνεύματι—whether in prophecy, teaching, speaking in tongues or interpretation. And it is not without significance that the charismatics that Paul placed first in the Church—apostles, prophets, teachers (1Cor 12, 28)—are all characterized by pneumatic gifts.⁶³

Ellis’s reference to a special group in the Corinthian church appears to run directly counter to Paul’s teaching here against “spiritual elitism.” Gordon Fee is more helpful when he says,

This paragraph has endured a most unfortunate history of application in the church. Paul’s own point has been almost totally lost in favor of an interpretation nearly 180 degrees the opposite of his intent. Almost every form of spiritual elitism, “deeper life” movement, and “second blessing” doctrine has appealed to this text. To receive the Spirit according to their special expression paves the way for people to know “deeper truths” about God. One special brand of this elitism surfaces among some who have pushed the possibilities of “faith” to the extreme, and regularly make a “special revelation” from the Spirit their final court of appeal. Other “lesser” brothers and sisters are simply living below their full privileges in Christ. Indeed, some advocates of this form of spirituality bid fair to repeat the Corinthian error in its totality.⁶⁴

The history-of-religions school said Paul’s reference to “wisdom” is a Gnostic expression, which Paul has picked up either for apologetic refutation or for positive use. Stuhlmacher disagrees, noting Gerd Theissen’s appeal to Jewish wisdom traditions⁶⁵ and Hans Conzelmann’s conclusion that Paul engaged in “theology as schooling in wisdom.”⁶⁶ Stuhlmacher’s thesis is this: “In 1 Cor 2:6-16 we are indeed presented with a theory of knowledge shaped by

⁶²E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1978), p. 25.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁶⁴Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 120.

⁶⁵Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, trans. J. P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 349-50. For a denial of significant Hellenistic influence on Paul’s conception of wisdom, Stuhlmacher mentions Jacques Dupont, *Gnosis: La Connaissance Religieuse dans les Épîtres de Saint Paul*, 2d ed. (Louvain: E. Nauwlaerts, 1960), pp. 531-34, 537ff.

⁶⁶Stuhlmacher, p. 335; citing H. Conzelmann, “Paulus und die Weisheit, ” in *Theologie als Schriftauslegung. Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Munich, 1974), pp. 177-90, esp. 179; H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2d ed., HNT 7 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), pp. 115, 120.

the wisdom traditions of Scripture, the Jesus-tradition, and the Christian experience of the Spirit.”⁶⁷ Stuhlmacher concludes,

Even for understanding the “depths of God” revealed by the Spirit (v 10), we must not press into service in the first instance late Gnostic tradition. An adequate understanding can be gained from the standpoint of Dan 2:22 and 2 Bar 14:8f.⁶⁸ The Holy Spirit as the power of illumination teaches us to explore the otherwise unfathomable depths of God’s way of salvation.⁶⁹

If we are not looking at some special subset of pneumatics or at deeper-truth mystics, we are certainly not looking at some Gnostic group of ‘illuminati’. We are looking at the notice of illumination for the general believer who must have illumination to understand the Scriptures.

Ellis points out that 1 Cor 2:6–16 comprises “a composite and highly interpreted quotation” reflecting on words from Isaiah.⁷⁰ Here Paul reminds his readers of the necessity of revelation and illumination, employing Isaiah’s assertion that Israel is alone among the nations in enjoying the self-revelation of the God of truth (Isa 64:4; 65:16). With Isaiah, Paul asks his hearers, “Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?” (Isa 40:13). Knowledge of God derives from God’s own self-revelation and is grasped by his Spirit: “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1Cor 2:10). The OT is clear that no one has ever seen God; the result is that any knowledge of God must come from his own self-revelation. As Fee says, “Here in particular the principle of ‘like is known by like’ is spelled out in detail, in this case influence by the OT motif that no one has ever seen God.”⁷¹ Just as revelation is *given* only by the Spirit, so also it can be *received* only by the Spirit: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (v 14). Briefly stated, the self-knowing revealer is the illuminator.

Fee’s warning and Stuhlmacher’s reminder of the Jewish wisdom background of this material caution us against reading into this material any kind of spiritual elitism, whether the focus is on the superiority of the *believer* or the superiority of his *knowledge*. We are looking at neither “deeper *life*” nor “deeper *truth*”; we are not looking at a special subset of pneumatics, mystics, or Gnostics. We are exploring the general illumination required of *all* believers who would understand *anything* of the Word. Robert Funk’s contempt for the Corinthians’ mentality is quite to the point:

Paul cannot give them the ‘mysteries’ (which they thought they possessed) because they have been and are ‘fleshly’ (which they thought they weren’t) until they become ‘spiritual’ (which they believed themselves to be); when they become ‘spiritual’ they will see that the ‘mysteries’ are nothing other than the word of the cross, which is foolishness, and that the strife and envy among them is

⁶⁷Stuhlmacher, pp. 338-39.

⁶⁸“O Lord, my Lord, who can understand your judgment? Or who can explore your way? Or who can discern the majesty of your path? Or who can discern your incomprehensible counsel? Or who of those who are born has ever discovered the beginning and end of your wisdom?” (2 Bar 14:8-9; trans. A. F. J. Klein, in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983], 1:626).

⁶⁹Stuhlmacher, p. 337.

⁷⁰Ellis, p. 156.

⁷¹Fee, *Corinthians*, p. 111; citing B. E. Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea of ‘To Know God’ Against the Hellenistic Background,” *NTS* 14 (1967/68) 215-21.

the sign of their fleshliness (3:3). Paul has simply turned their language, and thus their expectations, inside out in the interest of bringing them face to face with the word of the cross.⁷²

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19 notes the source, nature, target, and goals of illumination. The *source* of illumination is "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father" (v 17). This is a free gift of God essential to understanding. When Jesus' disciples heard him teach in parables then say, "He who has ears, let him hear," they asked him why. He told them, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them" (Matt 13:9-11)—the 'why' of parables had to do with illumination. John reminded the church of the promise written in the Prophets, "they will all be taught by God" (John 6:45). As a gift of God, this wisdom is not in us by nature, man is merely "wise in his own eyes" (Prov 26:12); therefore, no man can be "self-taught," as Owen noted.⁷³ On the other hand, because the Thessalonians were "taught by God," Paul could forego instruction on some things: "we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other" (1Thess 4:9).

By *nature* illumination is "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." As "the Spirit of wisdom" it is the anointing Spirit of the messianic judge, "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:2). It is the wisdom that leads to "delight in the fear of the LORD" and to the correct judgment that Paul promised the Corinthian church (v 3, cf. 1Cor 2:15).

Owen's teaching on this "Spirit of... revelation" guides us carefully between careless subjectivism on the one hand and manipulative objectivism on the other. He notes that it is an internal subjective revelation that does not reveal new things to our mind; rather, it enables our minds to understand the things that are revealed already. As the "Spirit of... revelation" it renders us receptive to and capable of understanding the things revealed in Scripture.

The *target* of illumination is "the eyes of your heart," which Paul prays "may be enlightened" (v 18). This is what the Psalmist prayed for when he read the *Torah* (Ps 119:18). It is the internal work of illumination to understand the mysteries of the gospel.⁷⁴

The *goal* of illumination is "that you may know him better." Owen said, illumination comes "that you may know..." in *particular* what the psalmist called in *general* "wonderful things" (Ps 119:18): "the hope to which he has called you," and "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints," and "his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Eph 1:18^b-19^a). He says,

Such are the things that are proposed to us in the Scripture. And the principal reason why some men judge it so easy a matter to understand and comprehend by the innate abilities of their own minds the revelations that are made in the word of God unto us, is because they do not apprehend that there is any thing wonderful, or truly great and glorious in them. And, therefore, because they cannot raise their minds unto a comprehension of these mysteries as they are in themselves, they corrupt and debase them to suit them unto their own low, carnal apprehensions.⁷⁵

1 John 2:20, 27 speaks of illumination in terms of "anointing." We must think of this Spirit who anoints in terms of the promise of the Father, the permanent Paraclete who is the

⁷²Robert W. Funk, "Word and Word in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16," in *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology*, ed. R. W. Funk (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 300, n. 107.

⁷³Owen, 4:153.

⁷⁴Owen, 4:138.

⁷⁵Owen, 4:135.

Spirit of truth. Here John specifically sets this over against error, reminding his readers that they enjoyed illumination and were thus protected against deception by false teachers. Just as Paul could note that he did not even need to write the Thessalonians about loving one another, since they were “taught by God” (1Thess 4:9), John told his readers that because of the anointer-teacher you people “do not need anyone to teach you” (1John 2:27).

The passage insists “you do not need anyone to teach you, ” but it is egalitarian not elitist in this note. John undercuts any sense of elitism that might appeal to special illumination by noting that it is not just a few of the *pneumatikoi* have the anointing: “all of you know the truth.”⁷⁶ It is likely that “the anointing” here is reflecting the OT language about reception of the Spirit, indicating the general reception of the promised Spirit who would come to teach believers and guide them into all truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).⁷⁷ This could not be some exclusive anointing for teachers such as papal or Gnostic claims might make later, but neither is it possible to follow C. H. Dodd in his identification of the “anointing” with “the Gospel itself.” He warns of the danger of subjectivism:

The appeal to the indwelling Spirit easily declines into an appeal to the individual experience of ‘inspiration’. If such experience is made the criterion, persons with little grasp of the central truths of the Gospel may mistake their own ‘inspirations’ (or bright ideas) for the truth of God, and so the corporate, historical tradition of Christianity is imperilled. Our writer found that this was actually happening within his sphere of influence (see iv. 1-6). If, on the other hand, we are referred to the Gospel itself, which is a recital of what God did for us in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—to the Gospel not as merely heard, believed and remembered, but as livingly apprehended and retained as a power in our lives—then there is an objective standard by which the faith of the Church is kept true to what is distinctive in the Christian revelation. The interior testimony of the Holy Spirit is confirmation of the *datum* in the Gospel (see iv. 13).⁷⁸

This does provide a comfortable freedom from subjectivism like that claimed by false teachers who would contend they had superior illumination; however, it is an otherwise unknown circumlocution for “the Gospel itself” to call it “an anointing.” Ignace de la Potterie offers a more satisfactory explanation for the relation of the “anointing” with Scripture: “The anointing is indeed *God’s word*, not as it is preached externally in the community, but as it is received by faith into men’s hearts and remains active, *thanks to the work of the Spirit*.”⁷⁹ Though Dodd’s move to equate “the anointing” with the Gospel objectively deposited is misguided, de la Potterie’s equation of anointing with the Gospel personally grasped is compelling. The language here is similar to John’s language about reception of the Spirit in John 14–16.

John has made it clear: the antidote to false teaching is illumination. In that vein, the elder refers them back to what they had been taught (v 27). Though the *identity* of the “anointing” is not “the Gospel itself, ” the *purpose* of the “anointing” is to shed light on “the Gospel itself.” So false teachers can claim no corner on Gospel insights, every believer enjoys the in-

⁷⁶Owen read, και οιδατε παντα (A C [049] ~ latt sy bo) “you know all things” (KJV), instead of οιδατε παντες (Å P Y pc; Hes) “you all know” (RSV, NIV, NASB).

⁷⁷I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 153. He also cites R. Snackenber, *Die Johannesbriefe* (Freiburg: Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 1953); 1975⁵, pp. 151-54.

⁷⁸C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), pp. 63-64.

⁷⁹Ignace de la Potterie, “Anointing of the Christian by Faith, ” in de la Potterie and S. Lyonnet, *The Christian Lives by the Spirit* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1971), pp. 79-143, esp. 80, n. 40; same as “L’onction du chrétien par la foi, ” *Bib* 40 (1959) 12-69.

ternal instruction of the anointer who brings home the force of the received Gospel with authority and clarity. Marshall summarizes this:

So again the antidote to falling into false ideas of the Christian faith is to be found in holding fast to the initial statement of Christian truth given in the apostolic witness, as this is confirmed in our hearts by the anointing given by the Spirit. It cannot be otherwise with a religion based on a historical, once-for-all revelation. Granted that the Lord has yet more light to break forth from his Word, it is nevertheless from the Word that new understanding issues, and any new doctrine which is not in harmony with the Word is self-condemned.⁸⁰

Pentecostalism has a checkered past in this matter. Though the approach was generally rejected by Pentecostals, one reads about the early Oneness heresy being defended by appeal to “new revelation.” Some claimed “Oh, you’ll never get this by studying it out like some other doctrine. This comes by ‘revelation.’”⁸¹ Statements like these deny illumination of “the Gospel itself” in favor of “new revelation,” reflecting noetic nihilism with regard to reading Scripture but noetic hubris with regard to so-called revelations. The result—heresy.

That checkered past is reflected in the contemporary charismatic-Pentecostal situation. One may, for example, still read a Cantelon’s claims that “revelations” function as a standard of interpretation, and the existential hermeneutic that prevails in SPS is proving inadequate to deal with continuing heresy. The 1989 annual program of that society included a defense of heresies. David Bernard read a paper that was an attempt to rescue Pentecostal Unitarianism, commonly called the “Oneness” doctrine; and Roswith Gerloff read a meandering paper asserting that animistic African religions can aid us in a better understanding of a proper Pentecostal religion. Gerloff defended a pantheistic frame of reference, asserting the value of “the genuinely African principle of the ‘force vitale’, or interconnectedness of all Being pertaining to a well-understood and freshly interpreted Biblical tradition of creation-powers both in the Old and New Testaments.”⁸² This openness to heresy is only what should be expected in circles that follow the Johns’ rejection of fixed truth, calling it the “‘objectivist tyranny’ in which concern for *The Truth* gives rise to the slogan ‘there is one truth for me, the same for you, and I mind very much the difference.’”⁸³

Fortunately, that openness to heresy does not reflect the general stance of classical Pentecostals today. Paul Grabill is true to the general Pentecostal line when he notes the role of the Spirit in maintaining good doctrine. After mentioning the role of the Spirit in revelation he reminds his readers that they should “see the need of the Spirit’s power in *preserving* that same truth.”⁸⁴ Commenting on 2Tim 1:13–14, he says,

Timothy was reminded that this gift does not result in “timidity,” but in power, love, and self-discipline. Power, love, and self-discipline for what purpose? To guard good doctrine. Interestingly, the charge of 1 Timothy 4:14 not to neglect the gift contains a similar juxtaposition with the emphasis on good teaching. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift” (vv. 13, 14).⁸⁵

⁸⁰Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, p. 164.

⁸¹Brumback, p. 202.

⁸²David K. Bernard, “The Oneness View of Jesus,” SPS Papers (1989), rejected the labels “Unitarian” and “Oneness” but retained all the aberrant statements about Trinitarian theology that earned the movement those names; Roswith Gerloff, “Theology En Route of Migration,” SPS Papers (1989), p. E–11.

⁸³Johns, SPS Papers (1989), p. H-11.

⁸⁴Paul E. Graybill [*sic*], “Gifted to Guard Good Doctrine,” *Paraclete* 20.2 (1986) 1.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 3.

Grabill notes “Paul tells us that preservation of good doctrine does not *stifle* the Spirit, but we must in fact *rely upon* the Spirit and His charismata to gain the power to withstand attacks against the sound teaching of the gospel.”⁸⁶

b) Danger of noetic hubris

Pentecostals who address the issue of hermeneutics must deal forthrightly with the danger of noetic hubris; therefore, two specific interests in Pentecostalism require balanced treatment. Pentecostals give special attention to spiritual gifts and to a form of Pentecostal empiricism. Both of these emphases have built in abuse factors.

Appeal to the exercise of spiritual gifts can easily degenerate into a spiritualized elitism. The Corinthian church enjoyed their charismatic experience and generated some “super-apostles” (2Cor 11:5) whose inflated claims Paul countered with the marks of a true apostle. More than that, he insisted “such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (2Cor. 11:13). Contemporary “super-apostles” are proliferating, so a methodical argument against spiritual elitism is a priority. On the other hand, contemporary abuses must not provoke a reaction that negates the true gifts, such as the “message of wisdom” and the “message of knowledge” (1Cor 12:8).

Finding a balance in Pentecostal empiricism will also be a challenge. Early Pentecostalism inclined toward forming, or at least affirming, doctrine by appeal to experience. In this they were reflecting their Wesleyan roots, following John Wesley’s appeal to experience coupled with exegesis to establish firm doctrine. Today’s Pentecostal scholarship continues that strand of thought, pushing a Pentecostal empiricist epistemology that sometimes contrasts even sound dogma with what “I’ve seen with my own two eyes.” Stronstad sees the empiricist strain in Menzies’ “Holistic” hermeneutic, which works on three levels: the inductive, deductive, and verification levels.⁸⁷ This last level appeals to empirical data to lend certainty to exegetical conclusions.

Ervin also appeals to empirical data, to “intuitive, non-verbal communication between God and man, namely miracles.”⁸⁸ He sets out “four factors that must influence any programmatic development of a Pentecostal hermeneutic.” Pentecostals can give at least qualified approval to his first two “factors.” His first is a “respect for the facticity of the Biblical record”; however, his respect is based not upon inspiration but upon its human origins in “the testimony of the Church” and in our “pneumatic continuity in experience, faith, and doctrine with the Church’s historic understanding of these elements.” Here we get an echo of the Roman idea that the church is the source of the canon. His second factor asserts that “the Christ of faith is the Jesus of history.” His third factor calls for acceptance of critical contributions to biblical scholarship but for rejecting the critics’ assertions of internal contradictions;⁸⁹ however, he bases that caution not upon revelation and its resulting infallibility but rather on the NT record

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁷Roger Stronstad, “Trends in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *Paraclete* 22.3 (1988) 9.

⁸⁸Ervin, p. 21.

⁸⁹Not all Pentecostal scholars are holding to this guideline. The authors know of a dissertation by a young Assemblies of God scholar who built his thesis around assertions of contradictions between Paul and Luke. Though we have read its final form, efforts to obtain it for use in writing this monograph were met by notice from the degree granting university’s library that the author has withheld it from circulation for a two year period.

of apostolic unity (Gal 1:18; 2:1ff. Acts 15:6ff), the “Christian Sanhedrin.”⁹⁰ Here also we get that same Roman echo. Ervin’s fourth “factor,” the empirical note, is the most troublesome:

Pentecostal experience with the Holy Spirit gives existential awareness of the miraculous in the Biblical world view. These events are recorded as no longer “mythological,” but “objectively” real. Contemporary experiences of divine healing, prophecy, miracles, tongues, and exorcism are empirical evidence of the impingement of a sphere of non-material reality upon our time-space existence with which one can and does have immediate contact.⁹¹

Appeals such as this to “empirical evidence” sound like some Pentecostals are expecting to find definitive external empirical illumination via the mighty acts of God—though not infallibly interpreted—rather than by an internal work of the Spirit testifying to the Scriptures. Ervin wants to set forth a Pentecostal option for hermeneutics informed by this new empiricism, but what he sets out sounds almost like Kant’s attempt to synthesize rationalism and empiricism:

What is needed is an epistemology firmly rooted in the Biblical faith with a phenomenology that meets the criteria of empirically verifiable sensory experience (healing, miracles, etc.) and does not violate the coherence of rational categories. A pneumatic epistemology meets these criteria and provides a resolution of (a) the dichotomy between faith and reason that existentialism consciously seeks to bridge, even though at the expense of the pneumatic; (b) the antidote to a destructive rationalism that often accompanies a critical-historical exegesis; and (c) a rational accountability for the mysticism by a piety grounded in *sola fidei*.

As is the case in apologetics, so also in hermeneutics: Cornelius Van Til’s biblical presuppositionalism provides a firm foundation. Hume demonstrated the failure of empiricism, especially with respect to the miraculous; the mighty acts of God are known to be that because of infallible interpretation. It is, in fact, quite possible to see miraculous signs and great wonders and yet lack illumination and therefore lack all understanding of what you are seeing and what it all means. Moses spoke to the church in the wilderness, accusing them of just that: “With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear” (Deut 29:3–4).

The Pentecostal empiricist’s appeal to verifiability fabricates a bogus epistemology, which will suffer its most serious failure in the face of “counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2Thess 2:9). Moses warned the church in the wilderness about the false prophet who would attempt miraculous authentication of his apostate discourse (Deut 13:1–5), and both Jesus and the apostle John warned the church of “these last days” that the spirits of demons would perform signs and wonders to deceive rather than to illuminate (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; Rev 13:13; 16:14; 19:20). Clearly, the Pentecostal cannot find a sovereign, verifiable, ground for epistemological certainty in his uninterpreted encounter with “the miraculous.” Marvels must be coupled with and interpreted by Scripture to have the illuminating power that qualifies them as true “signs and wonders.”

On the other hand, today’s church should acknowledge the value of signs and wonders for confirming the Word. Contemporary Pentecostal missions work forges ahead boldly pointing to the miraculous attestation of the Gospel to call people to Christ. In this, they follow the practice of Jesus and the early Gospel preachers—apostles or not—who were noted for “speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3). Luke spoke of “Jesus of Nazareth” as “a man ac-

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 24.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 24.

credited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22) and noted that deacons also preached with those same signs and wonders: “When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (8:6). Signs and wonders are not purely apostolic gifts. Paul lists “signs, wonders and miracles” as “things that mark an apostle” (2Cor 12:12), but he also lists “miraculous powers” among the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes throughout the many parts of the body “just as he determines” (1Cor 12:10-11, 28). This general pneumatic distribution is God’s own testimony to the Gospel: “This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb 2:3–4). Certainly God’s own confirmation enjoys unequalled candle power for illuminating Scripture; he gains for his word a hearing with understanding and leads men to obey God.

3. *Illumination at the Consummation*

Even though illumination gives us understanding of God’s truth, it does not eliminate the noetic reality of the Creator–Creature distinction. Neither does it immediately clear the noetic blur that results from the Fall. Paul deals with those limits, reminding us that “we know in part.” Moreover even with the spiritual gift of prophecy, our understanding is limited; therefore, we even “prophecy in part” (1Cor 13:9).

The solution to this shortfall will be found only “when perfection comes” at the Consummation (v 10): “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (v 12). Clearly the “perfection” to which Paul looks forward is neither the completion of the canon nor some sort of perfectionist Christian maturity. Paul is talking about the same hope that John expresses in similar terminology making even more explicit the connection with the Consummation: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1John 3:2). There we find the final goal of illumination: “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” This fulfills all the noetic possibilities of salvation denoted elsewhere. Then the believer will have totally broken with “the pattern of this world, ” being perfectly renewed in mind and doing God’s perfect will (Rom 12:2). Until then, “we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2Cor 3:18).

III. Practical Theology of ‘Illumination’

Some practical indications of how one might properly live with the expectation of spiritual illumination are certainly in order. In both private devotion and corporate spiritual life the Church should take more seriously the promise of illumination.

A. *Illumination: Private Devotions*

1. *Scripture Study*

The sage’s instruction in Proverbs 2:1–6 provides a helpful guide for the believer’s private devotional study of Scripture. Here the sage deals with the means, goal, and source of wisdom. All of this language describes the same phenomena we speak of as illumination in Scripture reading.

- a) The *means* for gaining wisdom are integrated with the Scriptures, which are the word of God.

- (1) The believer who would have wisdom must *acknowledge authority*: The sage tells his ‘son’, “accept my words” (v 1). The person who studies Scripture without acknowledging its authority has begun a course of study that is likely to harden his heart rather than to conform him to God’s image.
 - (2) The believer who acknowledges the claim of God’s word over life should *memorize Scripture*: The sage tells his ‘son’, “store up my commands within you” (v 1). Ready availability to mind maximizes the impact of Scripture. By hiding it away in the heart, the believer is internalizing the Word, taking on the mind of Christ, who is the Word made flesh, being renewed in his image by the transformation of patterns of thought that will otherwise be adapted to those of this world order.
 - (3) The believer who acknowledges the claim of God’s word over life should *study with discipline*: The sage tells his ‘son’, “[turn] your ear to wisdom and [apply] your heart to understanding” (v 2). Though illumination is not the result of mere intellectual apprehension, an avid attention to Scripture is certainly necessary if one is going to “see wonderful things in [God’s] law” (Ps 119:18).
 - (4) The believer who acknowledges the claim of God’s word over life should *pray*: The sage tells his ‘son’, “call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding” (v 3). Both of the two former means will be facilitated by the means of prayer: The student who finds it difficult to memorize Scripture should pray that God will help the mind’s retention, and the student who finds it difficult to “apply the heart” should pray for the attentive heart of one who acknowledges the claim of God’s word over life.
 - (5) The believer who acknowledges the claim of God’s word over life should *value wisdom*: The sage tells his ‘son’, “look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure” (v 4). The student who values wisdom will abandon trivial pursuits in favor of momentous deliberations. The student who values wisdom will indeed hide away Scripture in the heart by memorization.
- b) The *end* of wisdom is theocentric rather than anthropocentric, theistic rather than humanistic. Rather than seeking merely academic integrity, the spiritual scholar of Scripture is seeking spiritual integrity.
- (1) The student “will understand the fear of the LORD” (v 5), the elementary principle of wisdom (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10), which in turn will lead to a greater degree of acknowledgment that God’s word has authority over life. If “the fear of the LORD” is both the beginning and the end of wisdom, we have here the makings of a hermeneutical spiral that includes illumination—a move of no mean utility.
 - (2) The student will “find the knowledge of God” (v 5), which is understanding (Prov 9:10).
- c) The *source* of wisdom is God: “The LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (v 6).

2. *Devotional Reading*

Talk of devotional reading should start with a notice to include Scripture reading that has no immediate connection to teaching or preaching requirements. For that, programs moving readers through the Bible in a year or according to some other pattern are helpful. Beyond

that, believers should rediscover the devotional classics of the past.⁹² Augustine, Bunyan, Milton, Wesley, Spurgeon—each can serve as a goad to impassioned reading like the sage of Proverbs 2:1–6 called for. To the degree that this provokes a new thirst for the truth of God, it will augment illumination in the Scripture reader.

B. Illumination: Corporate Curriculum

It is time for the church to reincorporate the issue of illumination into all the theological curricula and at all the key levels of Bible education. Sunday school, pulpit, Bible institute, Bible college, seminary, and graduate program—each branch of the church should give new attention to illumination when preaching or when teaching hermeneutics, biblical theology, systematic theology, or homiletics.

1. Hermeneutics

Instructors and textbook authors on hermeneutics should devote renewed attention to the necessity for and nature of illumination. Texts and syllabi should engage modern epistemological assumptions in the light of the Creator-Creature distinction, the noetic effects of sin, illumination, and the perspicuity of Scripture.

An assertion that illumination is necessary followed by an entire course or text that fails to integrate it denies by action what was stated by proposition. Children are not the only students prone to learn more from action than from verbal instruction. The writers of hermeneutics textbooks should both treat the subject itself in a chapter and integrate it in the rest of the text. For example, the section on interpreting parables should never ignore illumination; illumination was necessary for initial understanding among Jesus' disciples, and illumination is necessary if our own students are going to avoid treating them as trite morality tales.⁹³

The professor who teaches hermeneutics should consider incorporating a section on the hermeneutics of devotional reading into the syllabus. Beyond that the professor's own pattern of instruction should manifest an open reliance on illumination. The class that opens with a prayer for illumination has from the start indicated something to the student. Beyond that, the professor should demonstrate a degree of humility that allows open admission to students when incontestable interpretation evades one's best efforts. Let the student know that "problem passages" are actually a result of noetic blur in our reading eyes rather than on the page. Even the professor only knows "in part" and should be praying, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps 119:18).

Given the warning that "from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48), professors of hermeneutics should make their constant prayer a petition for "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph 1:17); "you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

2. Exegetical and Biblical Theology

Stuhlmacher's complaint about the lack of attention to the hermeneutical implications of 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 could be repeated for most of the key passages dealing with illumination. Commentaries treating such passages should, to the degree that content guidelines allow, develop the devotional, hermeneutical, and homiletical implications of illumination passages. In

⁹²For an excellent review of devotional classics, see James M. Houston, "A Guide to Devotional Reading," in *The Best of Theology*, 2 vols., gen ed., J. I. Packer (Carol Stream, Illinois: Christianity Today, Inc., 1987), 1:269-89.

⁹³For an article applying this exhortation to the Psalms, see Waltke, "On How to Study the Psalms Devotionally," *Crux* (June, 1980).

doing so, new attention should be directed to the Reformers and Puritans for an old but still shining light: they can still teach us much about realizing the benefits of Scripture's perspicuity by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps it is even time once again for even scholarly material to re-adopt something of the devotional focus that used to characterize the works of leading biblical and theological scholars. Scholars, such as lexicographers, text critics, *et al.*, do the church a service only to the degree that their work eventually contributes—directly or indirectly—to materials that can help believers “see wonderful things in [God’s] law.” The higher in the spiritual food chain a scholar operates, the more likely his work is to benefit the Church. Unnecessarily dusty commentary on the concepts of Scripture found in Johannine christology, Pauline soteriology, or Lucan ecclesiology may stem as much from a failure to acknowledge that it is all divine christology, soteriology, or ecclesiology as from the requirements of carefully reasoned scholarly interchange. Fee’s observation about this situation is valid:

All too often the emphasis on the human side of Scripture results in the hearing of *a* word from *man* more than *the* word of *God*. In Scripture God does not so much speak to people, as people are speaking to and about him. The result is what James Smart called “the strange silence of the Bible in the church,” a failure of “thus saith the Lord,” but plenty of “I think,” “I maintain,” or “it seems to me.”⁹⁴

Augustine, Calvin, and Owen always found a way to maintain a spiritual tone when treating “the wonderful things in [God’s] law”—so should today’s scholars.

3. *Systematic Theology*

It is time for a full monograph on illumination. The passages to which this chapter has made only brief reference all deserve thorough treatment in the context of illumination. The issue of epistemology and its relation to illumination deserves at least chapter length treatment in such a monograph. The monograph should give attention to the relation of illumination to such topics as the perspicuity of Scripture, the “message of wisdom” and the “message of knowledge” (1Cor 12:8), the role of the New Testament prophet, and the general priesthood of believers.

Short of such a monograph, someone should release an updated adaptation of John Owen’s “ΣΥΝΗΣΙΣ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ, The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurances Therein; and A Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures with the External Means of the Interpretation of Them.”⁹⁵ This is so far the finest treatment on illumination available, but its outdated English and structure make it difficult enough to follow that many students would benefit more from his work if it were adapted to modern English and arranged under modern heading styles.

Evangelicalism should refine the scope and coverage of the whole encyclopedia of the Systematic Theology curriculum so that illumination is reincorporated where necessary. Any handbook or monograph that deals with the Doctrine of Scripture without reference to illumination falls short. Similarly, treatments of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit that omit illumination should be subjected to revision. Pentecostals should not only give greater attention to regeneration as a work of the Spirit to balance the traditional focus on Pentecostal distinctives, we should also deal seriously with illumination and give special attention to our understanding of

⁹⁴Fee, “Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics and the Nature of Scripture,” *Crux* 26.2 (1990) 24; referring to James Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

⁹⁵*Works*, 4 vols. (Johnstone & Hunter: London, 1678), 4:118-234.

how this relates to the so-called revelation gifts. Charismatic abuses like Cantelon's, demand that special attention be given to a proper understanding of the sufficiency and absolute authority of Scripture for all doctrine and practice. Treatments of the Doctrine of Man should deal with the relationship of illumination and the image and likeness of God that the Fall marred and salvation restores.

4. *Apologetics*

Cornelius Van Til has done more than any other apologete to deal with the matter of the sufficiency of Scripture for establishing an apologetic stance. In so doing, he developed a thoroughly Christian epistemology without peer during his time. His own pupil John Frame has advanced this discussion considerably in his apologetics syllabi and now in his monograph on Christian epistemology.⁹⁶ Apologetes should take seriously the scriptural assertion that illumination is necessary for understanding the things of God. Works on apologetics should give new attention to the essential condition of illumination for effective apologetics—illumination for the apologete *and* for the one being evangelized.

5. *Homiletics*

Homiletics textbooks and syllabi should incorporate a devotional element. The program of Proverbs 2:1–6 should gain ascendancy over homiletical methods that run rote exercises mechanically enlisting word studies, inductive and deductive exegesis, illustration, and application in the homiletical task. Pastors should labor to bring a message that will provoke a response from the pew: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he... opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

The preacher, in turn, should take seriously the Reformation's emphasis upon the priesthood of all believers. Pastors and teachers should encourage and equip their congregations and classes to engage in personal Bible study and devotions, expecting that God will bless those efforts with his illuminating Spirit.

In short, the pastor or teacher's exhortation should be that of Proverbs 2:1–6 and the prayer for the congregation or class should be that of Ephesians 1:17–19.

⁹⁶John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987).