The domain of the Word: scripture and theological reason

Webster, J.

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The Domain of the Word

Scripture and Theological Reason

John Webster
The two principal works of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture are inspiration and illumination. Inspiration is the narrower term, indicating the Spirit’s superintendence and moving of the processes of Scripture’s production: by the Spirit, these authors write these words. Illumination is more comprehensive. Most generally, illumination refers to the ways in which the operation of creaturely intelligence is caused, preserved and directed by divine light, whose radiance makes creatures to know: that light is what enables [the soul] to understand whatever is within the range of its powers.¹ In relation to Holy Scripture, illumination has a broader and a narrower sense. Taken at its widest, illumination embraces a range of the Spirit’s acts in relation to the church’s receiving of the Word of God — not only the interpretation of Scripture but also the recognition that Scripture is divine instruction. By the Spirit’s testimony, believers are enlightened and assured that Scripture is authoritative and trustworthy; again, by the Spirit’s illumination the church acknowledges that the biblical writings comprise a canon, that is, a determinate and unified collection of texts which acts as measure and rule of faith and practice. More narrowly construed, however, illumination refers to the Spirit’s work of so enlightening the church’s reading and contemplation of the words of the prophets, evangelists and apostles that regenerate intelligence comes to know the mind of God. ‘Converted persons . . . have enlightened eyes of understanding’ because ‘they have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit who teaches them all things.’²

Theological articulation of all these works of the Spirit is accompanied by difficulties, both perennial and occasional. The perennial difficulties are those which always attend talk of the Spirit's work. The workings of the Spirit in illumination, as in all things, are mysterious, exceeding creaturely capacity. When created reason strives to gaze upon the 'divine light,' Augustine says, 'it blinks and shivers in its weakness.' Moreover, such is the corruption of our nature that the work of the Spirit is frequently despised or rejected, appeal to the Spirit in describing how creatures come to acquire knowledge being judged irrational. 'He needs no furtherance in the forfeiture of his reputation with many, as a person fanatical, estranged from the conduct of reason, and all generous principles of conversation, who dares to avow an interest in [the Spirit's] work, or take upon him the defence thereof.' Such difficulties are not peculiar to pneumatology; they are the common affliction of theology in its common affliction of theology in via, pervasive, routinely overlooked and so must be made an object of acute intellectual and spiritual vigilance.

The occasional difficulties are those laid upon a theology of Scripture and its interpretation by its particular set of historical and cultural circumstances. In the case of modern theology, the phenomena present themselves readily enough: a shift away from inspired Scripture and illuminated readers to a 'post-confessional,' 'post-theological' Bible; assimilation of biblical study to other practices of textual inquiry; the uncoupling of Scripture from ecclesial life: in short, a comprehensive reworking of the origin, nature, setting and ends of Scripture and its interpretation. These phenomena betray a pervasive naturalism which separates divine communicative activity from human acts, authorial or hermeneutical, one of whose chief effects is to make language about God redundant in talking of the biblical texts and their reception. On such an account, authorial and hermeneutical acts must bear their principle within themselves: responsible intellectual activity cannot be moved ab alio. A theology of inspiration and illumination, however, appears to do just that, and so to entail the suspension of natural powers.

How does theology conduct itself in this situation? Two preliminaries should be noted. First, historical and cultural circumstances are not wholly transparent; they have to be understood on the basis of the gospel's teaching. Description of their nature, causes and resolution requires spiritual-theological discrimination. Only so can theology judge its circumstances with clarity, make use of the opportunities which those circumstances offer and release itself from their inhibitions. Second, occasional difficulties are often forms under which perennial difficulties break the surface. Finding a
way out of them may therefore depend on not dealing with them on precisely the terms in which they present themselves. Textual and hermeneutical naturalism, for all its common sense appeal, may indicate resistance to the revelatory missions of the Son and the Spirit through the prophetic and apostolic witnesses. Before theology can proceed, such resistance may need to be healed. To understand illumination, therefore, theological reason needs illumination.

Dealing with theological difficulties, perennial or occasional, demands an ascetics of theological reason and its practitioners. But it also requires attentive biblical-dogmatic description. Theological difficulties are exacerbated by debased, distorted or truncated understandings of theological topics and by misapprehension of their place in the system of Christian teaching. In overcoming this, much can be expected from full, loving description of the matter of Christian faith. In the present case, therefore, a theological exposition of the nature of illumination is of capital importance. Such a presentation should devote particular attention to the underlying principles of the divine work of illumination - most of all, to the dogmatic principia of pneumatology. These principles include an account of the characteristic modes of the Spirit's activity in the economy, an account which in turn rests upon a theology of the deity and personality of the Spirit, and of the opera dei ad intra which ground and move the opera dei externa. Making sense of illumination, as well as dealing with the perplexities it evokes, demands a good deal more than a theory of texts and the activity of readers. Its heart must be a theology of the Spirit and the Spirit's work in respect of created intelligence. A theology of the Spirit will set out two affirmations of wide consequence for scriptural hermeneutics (here stated from what can surely be acclaimed as the greatest Reformed treatise on the Spirit, Owen's Pneumatologia). First, God the Holy Spirit is 'the sole cause and author of all the good that in this world we are or can be made partakers of', including the good of knowledge of divine truth. Second, we may not conclude that in either the moral or the intellectual sphere the working of the Spirit means that 'we signify nothing ourselves', because 'the Holy Spirit so worketh in us that he worketh by us, and what he doth in us is done by us'. Properly understood and allowed to inform exegetical practice, this twofold principle - that the Spirit directs creaturely intelligence and that the Spirit operates 'in and by the faculties of our own minds' - will ease much bewilderment about or disinclination to the theology of illumination, and set Christian hermeneutics on a better footing. To approach the interpretation of Scripture on the basis that God the Spirit is 'the eternal original spring and fountain of all truth [and] also the only sovereign cause and author of its
revelation to us\textsuperscript{10} is not to deny the operation of hermeneutical reason but to describe the kind of activity which is proper to it as the Spirit's creature and instrument.

The setting of an account of illumination is a theological meditation on the economy of the Spirit; here it is laid out according to the \textit{ordo disciplinae}, to display most clearly the order, proportions, connection and integrity of the material.\textsuperscript{11}

Corresponding to the perfect and wholly sufficient work of the Son in the redemption of fallen creatures, there is a further mission of God in their regeneration and restoration to intelligent, consensual, affective and active fellowship with God. This is the mission of the Holy Spirit, by whose grace it comes about that there is a company of creatures in whom redemption is brought to full realization in the renewal of creaturely nature. The Spirit 'perfection the work of the Son by bringing his work to its creaturely term, manifesting its virtue, distributing its benefits and establishing a creaturely subject to receive, know and act out of its grace. The renewal of creaturely nature includes renewal in the knowledge of God; for the Spirit is 'the spirit of wisdom and of revelation' (Eph. 1:17). This work of the Spirit is the environment for a theology of revelation, and therefore of Holy Scripture as its prophetic and apostolic form, and therefore of the illumination of the regenerate mind for the reading of Scripture. The Spirit is given that, having the eyes of their hearts enlightened, the saints may know.

Such in barest outline is the regenerative and revelatory mission of the Spirit, out of which the nature of Scripture and scriptural hermeneutics is to be understood. This mission is to be set in relation to two further matters.

First, as with all God's external works, the economic mission of the Spirit refers back to the Spirit's antecedent deity and personhood, in which the mission has its ground. Missions follow processions; the character of the work is determined by the nature of the one who works. And so of the Spirit whose illuminating gift restores cognitive fellowship between God and lost creatures, we must say, for example, (1) that he shares in all the properties of the majestic, undivided divine essence: he is in every respect replete, self-subsistent, infinite in goodness and holiness, boundlessly alive and possessed of all power, glory, knowledge and wisdom; God is light and so the Holy Spirit is light. (2) He has his personhood in relation to the Father and the Son; in the order of the divine processions in which God and the Son eternally relationally interact, the Father as God the Father and the Son as God the Son are the fountainhead of all the Spirit's activity, and so the Spirit is the eternal outworking of the intercommunication of the Father and the Son.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 5.

\textsuperscript{11}Much of the structure and some of the details of the account are informed by Owen's \textit{Pneumatologia}.\textsuperscript{2}
he is breathed by the first and second persons. (3) Sharing in the divine nature in this way, he is entire apart from creatures, and only so does he love them and give himself to them; his economic presence and action are the presence and action of one who is gracious, sent to creatures, not summoned by them. (4) The outer works which are eminently assigned to him by appropriation are the works of the Spirit as divine person, not merely the presence of a divine force, impersonally conceived; his works are personal voluntary motions. (5) His outer works follow the unity and order of God’s life in himself, so that to speak of the economy of the Spirit is at the same time to speak of the inner and outer works of the Father and the Son who breathe the Spirit.

Why begin talk of illumination at such an apparently distant point? Because the illumination of created intelligence is the work of this one. Illumination is not a term for some stirring of created minds, loosely related to an opaque external source or stimulant; illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit who is in himself infinite divine wisdom, light and radiance. The works of God in the economy are to be understood by way of reduction, tracing them to the perfection of God before and above creatures, or by explicating their principle, that fullness of life which alone is the ground of creatures and of God’s loving acts towards what he has created. Theological talk of Scripture and of hermeneutical intelligence begins with the doctrine of God; the doctrine of God begins with God’s immanent triune fullness and bliss.

Second, the work of the Spirit in the opus gratiae of regeneration accords with his work in the opus naturae of creation. All the works of the Spirit of God are works of grace. The Spirit is given, sent, poured out, dispensed, falling upon creatures in fulfilment of the divine will and as an exercise of divine charity. Moreover, the mode of the Spirit’s regenerative work on and in the redeemed repeats, confirms and completes his mode of operation on and in all creatures, especially rational creatures. More specifically, the Holy Spirit is the giver and preserver of life; By the Spirit, God, breathes into creatures the breath of life, so constituting them. Creatures therefore possess life in a particular way, by virtue of an external quickening and maintaining principle, which is the Holy Spirit. This principle is a pure gift: creatures are creatures, ab alio, ex nihilo. Yet the principle is not entirely external to the creature; to speak in such terms is not to understand or magnify the Spirit’s grace. Certainly, the creature is not alive from itself or in itself, lacking the intrinsic capacity to preserve itself or carry itself forward to its own fulfilment. But what is communicated by the Spirit is, indeed, life, not merely a relation to another, quite separate and external life. The creature is alive, not with wholly original divine life, but with created life, at one and the same time intrinsic and extrinsic, within but not from within.

God loves the created nature which he has made and which he continues to hold in being and movement. And so of the Spirit’s work in the economy,
we may say: *non pertinet naturam rerum corrumpere sed servare*, not to destroy but to preserve the nature of things.\(^{12}\) The Spirit cherishes and conserves created realities and powers, offering no violence to them but so moving them that their integrity and dignity are preserved. A theology of illumination exemplifies this principle in stating how God acts on created intellect. Consider Aquinas’ handling of this matter in *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 – the setting, it is important to note, is not discussion of mental acts per se, but reflection *de mutazione creaturarum a Deo*, in the course of which the conversion of intellect to God is treated. The objection from which Aquinas begins – the supposed absolute originality of the act of human intelligence – has an uncannily ‘modern’ feel: ‘An action of the mind originates with the one in whom the action takes place ... An action, however, of a being that is moved by another does not originate with the subject of the action, but with its moving cause. The mind therefore is not moved by another.’\(^{13}\) The effect of this on the matter of illumination is registered in the next objection: ‘Whatever contains within itself a sufficient source of its own movement is not moved by anything outside. Now the movement of the intelligence is its own act of understanding ... A sufficient principle for the act of understanding is the intellective light inherent in the mind itself. It is not, then, moved by anything else.’\(^{14}\) The counter, at once biblical and metaphysical, is: ‘a teacher moves the mind of a learner. According to the psalm [93.10] God teaches man knowledge. Therefore God moves man’s mind.’\(^{15}\) Spelling this out in the *responsio*, Aquinas lays down two principles, intended to undermine the assumption that true mental acts are characterized by pure spontaneity. First, God – not the creature – is ‘the primary intelligent being’;\(^{16}\) second, therefore, ‘every power of intelligence derives from him, since the first in any order is the cause of everything subsequent in that order’.\(^{17}\) Yet there is no sense here that the operation of created intellect is compromised by the fact that ‘God is a mover of the created mind’.\(^{18}\) To speak of divine movement is not to eliminate creaturely movement but to say that, as *created*, it has its dignity as a second element: ‘An intellectual operation does have its origin from the mind in which it takes place as from its secondary cause, but from God as its primary cause, because he endows intelligent being with its power to know.’\(^{19}\) And so ‘the light of the mind along with the likeness of the thing known is admittedly a sufficient source of the act; and yet it is a secondary source, dependent on


\(^{13}\) Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 obj. 1.

\(^{14}\) Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 obj. 2.

\(^{15}\) Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 sed contra.

\(^{16}\) Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 resp.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.105.3 ad 1.
the primary source.\textsuperscript{20} In short: God makes and preserves created intellect and the Spirit moves its operation.

What of the acts of the Spirit in the \textit{opus gratiae}? In particular, what is to be said of the Spirit’s regeneration of created intellect, and his enlightenment of the mind to receive divine instruction by means of Holy Scripture? God’s love of creatures is limitless. Because this is so, he interposes himself in the situation of creaturely fallenness, into the alienation, disorder and pollution which sin brings about. In so doing, God fulfils his determination that rational creatures should come to enjoy perfect fellowship with himself. The divine interposition takes effect as a complex but single act of charity, in election, redemption and regeneration, proposed by God the Father, effected in time by God the Son and brought to full creaturely completion by God the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the declaration of this work of the Trinity and of the new reality which it establishes in creation.

As the perfecting cause of the work of grace, the Spirit participates in it in two especial ways. First, it is by the Spirit that the human nature of the incarnate Son is framed, moved and preserved to fulfil God’s purpose. Conceived by the Spirit, the incarnate Son is also sanctified by the same Spirit, endowed by the Spirit with all necessary grace, and empowered by the Spirit to enact his human nature and history in fulfilment of his mission. This work of the Spirit in relation to the Son’s human nature is at once extraordinary and ordinary: extraordinary, in that through the Spirit the Son has and deploys capacities not available to other creatures; ordinary, because all the Son’s human undertakings are the exercise of human powers of will, affection and intelligence.

Second, corresponding to the work of the Spirit in Christ the head of the church is his work in the church as Christ’s mystical body. By the Spirit, the new creation which was set in motion by the incarnation is filled out, establishing and preserving a creaturely coordinate to the Son’s saving work. There really is this coordinate; and it really is creaturely. Regeneration is the reinstitution of created nature, and the restoration of all those powers and activities in which it consists. Most of all, the fellowship with God which the Spirit actuates in creatures is not only a state or condition passively inhabited, but a living, practical and intelligent history. The coming of the Spirit upon creatures sanctifies them, and so generates active moral uprightness and integrity. The Spirit also bestows a new intellectual nature, declaring Christ to the church and quickening the regenerate intellect to learn from his teaching.

To explicate this regeneration of intellectual nature, we must once again trace creaturely capacities and activities back to God’s all-sufficiency in which all things have their origin, and in particular to that all-sufficiency in its character as \textit{light}.

\textsuperscript{20}Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae} 1a.105.3 ad 2.
In himself God is light, his being characterized by 'quintessential transparency'.21 There is no occlusion of the perfection with which each of the triune persons knows and is known by the others; in God there is no darkness to be overcome, no emerging into light, no being enlightened. There is pure, enduring, self-original light. In this light — that is, in the light of his own being and self-knowledge — God 'dwells' (1 Tim. 6.16): not in the sense that he is surrounded by light as an enveloping and illuminating setting, but in the sense that light is what God is.

As this one, God is radiant. He is light in himself, and therefore the source of light, and therefore resplendent. God's glory is 'his dignity and right not only to maintain, but to prove and declare, to denote and almost as it were to make himself conspicuous and everywhere apparent as the one he is'.22 This self-declaration — God's glory ad extra — has its foundation in God's inner glory, for God does not become light by his radiance towards creatures: he is radiant because he is first in himself all-sufficient light. And yet this all-sufficient light is not locked up in itself; it does indeed shine forth. Barth again: 'As the living God is the source of light, and light in himself, he also has and is the radiance of light . . . He is the radiance of light that reaches other beings and permeates them.'23

God so orders rational creatures that there is a creaturely coordinate to this omnipotent and omnipresent divine radiance. We are not simply bathed in light; it does not simply shine over us or upon us. Rather, it illuminates and so creates in creatures an active intelligent relation to itself. By virtue of God's self-declaration there takes place recognition, 'the coming into being of light outside him on the basis of the light inside him';24 This recognition is the creaturely movement corresponding to the divine work of illumination. Divine illumination sets created intellect in motion, arousing the exercise of the powers which God bestows and of whose movement he is the first principle.

Illumination . . . is a seeing of which man was previously incapable but of which he is now capable. It is his advancement to knowledge. That the revelation of God shines on him and in him, takes place in such a way that he hears, receives, understands, grasps and appropriates what is said to him in it, not with new and special organs, but with the same organs of apperception with which he knows other things, yet not in virtue of his own capacity to use them, but in virtue of the missing capacity which he is now given by God's revelation.25

23 Ibid., p. 646.
24 Ibid., p. 647.
It is *in God’s light* that creatures see light; but in God’s light creatures really do *see* (Ps. 36.9). Yet such is treachery of creatures against the nature and calling which God’s love has conferred on them that the creaturely coordinate to the divine light almost ceases to be. ‘Almost’, because it is not in the power of creatures to destroy their nature. They may despise their condition and situation, may attempt independent exercise of their given powers and so diminish them; but creatures cannot not be creatures, who have their being and come to know by the light of God. Yet creatures can so fail to realize their nature that they place themselves in a state of darkness and blindness with respect to God and all things in relation to God.

All creaturely capacities are had as they are exercised in dependence upon the presence and sustaining activity of the Spirit. So with the powers of the mind: to know is to be ‘taught by the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 2.13). It is just this which the ‘natural’ person repudiates by refusing to receive from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2.14). Such a person attacks his or her own intellectual nature, attributes everything to reasonings of the mind and considers not that he needs help from above, which is a mark of sheer folly. For God bestowed it [the mind] that it might learn and receive help from him, not that it should consider itself sufficient unto itself. For eyes are beautiful and useful, but, should they choose to see without light, their beauty profits them nothing; nor yet their natural force, but even does harm. So if you mark it, any soul also, if it choose to see without the Spirit, becomes even an impediment unto itself.26

As creatures strike out in intellectual independence, thinking themselves intellectually commanding, their minds in fact become ‘futile’ (Eph. 4.17), incapable of undertaking their function in communion with God, which is to be the seat of knowledge of the one who is their origin, end and delight. Fellowship with God is mortally imperilled by intellectual estrangement: ‘darkened in their understanding’, creatures are ‘alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them’ (Eph. 4.18). This is no occasional aberration, but an enduring state and habitual set of the mind. Fallen intellect *loves* darkness (Jn 3.19), and so places itself in its *dominion* (Col. 1.13). Thick darkness covers the peoples (Isa. 60.2).

The gospel is the supremely authoritative and effective announcement that, at the hands of God, the regime of darkness and ignorance is at an end. ‘Your light has come, the glory of the Lord has come upon you . . . the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you’ (Isa. 60.1f.). This promise of illumination has its fulfilment in the communion of the saints;

in this company is realized the comprehensive alteration of the creaturely condition. ‘Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord’ (Eph. 5.18): that gracious and beneficent alteration defines the situation of the church and ecclesial reason; and so it defines the church’s reading of Holy Scripture.

III

God’s work of redemption and regeneration includes a fresh publication and receiving of the knowledge of God, that is, both a fresh iteration of the divine splendour to darkened sinners, and the reestablishment of a productive creaturely subject of revelation. Once again, as in the opus naturae, so also in the opus gratiae: God loves creaturely nature and capacities and desires their full use, and so reveals himself in ways which are fitting to that nature and gives occasion for the exercise of those capacities. Accordingly, revelation takes place through creaturely signs, of which the chief is the text of Holy Scripture. Theology need feel no reticence or anxiety about acknowledging the mediation of revelation in texts. Hesitations on this score may arise from fear that God’s purity will be compromised by textual media; or, in a more sinister way, the hesitations may come from the kind of naturalism which considers language to be generated by and expressive of nothing other than human productivity. But God is in himself living speech; and in speaking to creatures by the Spirit he takes creaturely words into his service, ensuring their adequacy; checking the distortions introduced by fallenness and restoring their function as a sign of God’s glory. 27 The textual form of revelation is not a deficiency to be overcome by some purer, more immediate perception. Revelation is accommodation, its modes proportionate to its recipients; and accommodation is the exercise of charity (God working in and through and to the benefit of the created nature which he loves) and of power (God making creaturely words fitting and effective).

The Spirit of revelation in the knowledge of God superintends the authorship of Holy Scripture, so moving interiorly the biblical writers that, without detriment to their creatureliness, their writing is ‘inspired’ or ‘prophetic’, a ‘speaking from God’ (2 Pet. 1.21). Formed in this way, the texts acquire certain properties: They are perfect, that is, wholly sufficient, having no lack or excess, entirely suitable for the ministry to which they are commissioned. They constitute a unity: not a contingent association of

essentially disparate literary artefacts, but the media of one extended and complex act of divine communication. In all the diversity of author, occasion and genre, the texts are a single reality – Scripture – not by human intention but by virtue of their single origin in the work of the Spirit and their common function as the instrument of divine instruction. They are authoritative: the texts which result from the movement of the Spirit are an instrument of God’s rule of regenerate intelligence, will, affections and practice. Moreover, the Spirit produces faith that Scripture is the bearer of divine authority: that is, the Spirit creates the disposition to assent to and trust in the fact that by Scripture God commands and directs the regenerate. Lastly, the texts are perspicacious: by the Spirit’s inspiration and promised presence to the reader, Scripture is not an obscure and indefinite word but the place where illuminated intelligence may discover the knowledge of God clearly set forth.

None of these properties eliminates the work of reception or makes the activity of reading superfluous: As it reaches created intelligence, revelation is a compound event which includes more than one created element. Alongside the text of Scripture, there is the company of readers, summoned to direct their acts of reception in such a way that by the Spirit’s working the divine Word is appropriated. Scripture is not an ‘unsupplemented text’, its sufficiency is not self-sufficiency. There is inspired Scripture, and there is a set of Spirit-moved persons and activities (to avoid hermeneutical inflation, call them ‘readers’ and ‘reading’), which constitute created intelligence learning the divine mind. By the Holy Spirit who searches even the depths of God (1 Cor. 2.10), God reveals what has not been seen or heard or conceived by the human heart (1 Cor. 2.9f.). By the same Spirit, ‘spiritual’ persons are moved to ‘understand’ (1 Cor. 2.12), ‘impart’ (1 Cor. 2.13), and ‘interpret’ (1 Cor. 2.13), so that there arises a reception of the ‘thoughts of God’ (1 Cor. 2.11), spiritual understanding and discernment (1 Cor. 2.14). This second work of the Spirit is the work of illumination; it remains to indicate its basic character, and the arts and excellencies of mind and soul to which it gives rise.

By way of initial orientation, two principles should be reiterated. First, the ‘principal efficient cause’ of right perception of the mind of God in Scripture is the Holy Spirit of God himself alone . . . 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.39

3On 1 Cor. 2.6–16, see the fine essay by Yeago, ‘The Bible: The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures’, pp. 49–93.
Second, the Spirit works not by circumventing but by arousing and actuating human intelligence:

It is the fondest thing in the world to imagine that the Holy Ghost doth any way teach us but in and by our own reasons and understandings ... Whatever we know, be it of what sort it will, we know it in and by the use of our reason; and what we conceive, we do it by our understanding; only the inquiry is, whether there be not an especial work of the Holy Spirit of God, enlightening our minds, and enabling our understandings to perceive and apprehend his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture, and without which we cannot do so.31

A theology of illumination avoids both hermeneutical naturalism in which the actings of the mind, unmoved from outside, claim sufficiency for themselves, and hermeneutical immediacy in which seizure by the Spirit breaks off the exercise of intelligence and interpretation becomes rapture. This can now be set out in more detail.

The end of reading Holy Scripture is to know the mind of God who is its primary author and interpreter; all other intellectual acts in relation to this text are instrumental. Pursuit of this end requires the enabling of the Holy Spirit for two reasons. First, the res of Scripture is the mystery of the gospel, which does not yield to natural apprehension. In formal terms, this means that the gospel must explicate itself from within itself, unfolding itself to intelligence; the gospel is not an inert matter to be subjected to investigation. In relation to the gospel, created intelligence is not directive but directed. Put more materially, understanding of the gospel arises as the Father of glory gives a spirit of wisdom and understanding (Eph. 1.17), so enlightening the eyes of the heart (Eph. 1.18). What sets in motion creaturely apprehension of the gospel is God himself: the inner glory of God in its outward splendour, the inner wisdom of the Spirit who knows God's depths and is in himself infinitely wise, and who communicates this to creatures. Illumination is subjective revelation of the mystery of God. Second, the depravity of our nature is such that we resist acquiring knowledge of God's mind. Our governing affections are corrupt: inclined to vanity, insatiably curious about the surfaces of temporal things, confident in our intellectual powers, nimble in inquiring into what satisfies unregenerate appetite, but sluggish in seeking out knowledge of God, in love with falsehood. The correction of these faults is beyond our capacity. It requires both an objective communication of the divine splendour and a subjective enlightenment of the mind. This subjective enlightenment involves the impartation by the Spirit of principles and habits which enable us to complete the circle of revelation by meekness, reverence and deference in seeking the knowledge of God from Holy Scripture.

Illumination is subjective revelation in its reconciling and regenerative effectiveness.

Acted upon in this way by the Holy Spirit, regenerate intelligence is established and set to work in knowing divine truth in Scripture. Hermeneutical reason is, of course, subservient; it is pupil, not magister; its readiness for instruction does not precede the Spirit's coming. But none of this runs counter to the fact that the Spirit sets the intellect in motion. 'If God teach, we are to learn, and we cannot learn but in the exercise of our minds.'32 'Learning' is primary, indicating both dependence upon divine instruction and also the fact that knowledge arises by coming-to-know. Acquisition of knowledge is not instantaneous and intuitive. It is a temporally extended process, one which does not occur without the natural implements through which we come to know. The economy of the Spirit's revelatory grace is pedagogical; in it, creatures are trained to use their cognitive capacities, repaired by God, to proceed towards understanding of divine truth.33 In the case of Scripture, this is what distinguishes 'illuminated' reading from 'pneumatic' reading, in which the natural properties of text and reader are suspended. Illumination engages and redirects a range of human rational powers, advancing them to proper objects and ends as it conducts us out of darkness into intellectual day.

What created powers and activities are set in motion by the illuminating presence of the Spirit? Reading Holy Scripture for divine instruction involves the use of disciplinary and spiritual means.

'Disciplinary' means are the arts which reason deploys in making sense of textual signs. Holy Scripture is a text, and its sense is made over time, not infused in a moment; and the making of sense is an exercise of studiousness in the form of exegetical practices. These practices, properly understood, are elements in created reason's work in the economy of the Spirit. The hegemony of 'scientific' exegesis in biblical study is such that linguistic, textual and comparative historical-cultural skills are sometimes considered not only necessary but sufficient for understanding the biblical text; the cogency of this view depends in part upon a silent assumption that the end of understanding a text is reached when its natural properties have been exhaustively enumerated. In reaction, it would be easy enough to think that divine illumination makes exercise of these skills redundant. Better, however, to suggest that illuminated intelligence makes discriminations about disciplinary means, reaching judgements about the appropriateness, utility and limitations of hermeneutical arts and sciences, on the basis of a prior understanding of the setting, nature and ends of texts, interpretation and interpretative agents. Such a judgement might be that in the domain

32Ibid., p. 167.
of the Spirit's illumination, due use of these skills is by no means excluded, provided that (1) in using them, interpreters are not pressed to treat Scripture as what it is not—purely a natural entity—rather than recognizing its place in divine communication through signs; (2) the deployment of such skills is directed to fitting ends, above all, the hearing of the Spirit's instruction; (3) the skills do not become an occasion for destructive curiosity about the natural features of the text in isolation from their revelatory depth; and (4) the skills are exercised in a spiritual and ecclesial culture of interpretation by which the regenerate mind is formed, checked and directed.

The illuminated reader will, further, make use of spiritual means. Without a set of spiritual habits, the intellect is apt to wander from its proper studious vocation and drift into curiosity. The Spirit who inspires and illuminates also forms godly readers by implanting and fostering in them the habits of soul required of pupils in the schola revelationis. Owen gives a representative sample of such habits: (1) 'Fervent and earnest prayer for the assistance of the Spirit of God revealing the mind of God'; such prayer undermines hermeneutical prejudice, indeed, is 'the only way to preserve our souls under the influences of divine teachings and the irradiation of the Holy Spirit'; (2) 'Readiness to receive impressions from divine truths revealed unto us, conforming our minds and hearts unto the doctrine made known'; this, because the end of divine revelation is not accumulation of notions but conformity to divine truth; (3) 'Practical obedience in the course of our walking before God', because 'there is no practical science which we can make any great improvement of without an assiduous practice of its theorems; much less is wisdom, such as is the understanding of the mysteries of the Scripture, to be increased, unless a man be practically conversant about the things which it directs us unto'; (4) a holy dissatisfaction which presses ahead to knowledge, 'a constant design for growth and a purpose in knowledge, out of love to the truth and experience of its excellency'.

IV

'We look to thee to give us the fellowship of that Spirit who guided the prophets and apostles, that we may take their words in the sense in which they spoke and assign its right shade of meaning to every utterance.' There is in Hilary's prayer the most concise description of the elements of

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36Ibid., p. 205.
37Ibid., p. 206.
38Ibid.
illuminated hermeneutical intelligence: the Spirit who inspires the prophets and apostles is the Spirit who illuminates; the purpose of illumination is that the words of God's inspired ambassadors may be understood rightly; the acts of illuminated intelligence proceed from prayer for God's gift, that readers may partake of the Spirit's grace and so be taught of God.

"The anointing which you have received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him" (1 Jn 2.27).