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Miracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

16. God in Gaul (France)

This chapter traces the work of the Holy Spirit through four influential leaders in France across a thousand years. Each is presented as evidence that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and reliance on Scripture, continued long after the apostolic age.

Key takeaways

- Hilary of Poitiers (AD 310-367) defended the deity of Christ against the Arians so ably he was called the 'Athanasius of the West.' He also taught that the Spirit illumines Scripture and that the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 were still operating in his own day.
- Martin of Tours (AD 316-397), a student of Hilary, became a pastor and evangelist famous for healings and exorcisms. His biographer Sulpicius Severus records so many cures he reported only 'a few out of a multitude.' Martin planted churches and monasteries across previously unreached Gaul.

- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), a humble Cistercian abbot, was credited with many healings—reportedly up to thirty-six cures in a single day. He distinguished the Spirit's inward work (faith, hope, love, for our own salvation) from the outward gifts (healing, prophecy, for others' benefit), and urged gratitude for even the smallest of God's favors.
- Peter Waldo (1140-1218), a wealthy Lyons merchant, gave his fortune to the poor and funded a Bible in the common tongue. The Waldensians held Scripture as the final authority, rejected several church teachings, and were persecuted—foreshadowing later reformers like Wycliffe, Hus, and Luther.
- A recurring theme: the gifts are given to serve others and glorify God, never to exalt a person or group.

Passages worth keeping

“How truly is the manifestation of the Spirit seen in the bestowal of such useful gifts!”

Hilary sums up the chapter's thesis that the Spirit's gifts continued in the church.

“Behold now how much has to be poured into us in order that we may venture to pour out.”

Bernard's picture of inward 'Infusion' fueling outward 'Effusion'—the Spirit within before the Spirit upon.

How it connects

The Waldensian 1431 confession affirming anointing the sick with oil for healing echoes James 5:14, tying medieval practice back to apostolic instruction.

Scripture referenced

- **1 Corinthians 12:8-10** -- The list of spiritual gifts Hilary and Bernard both expound.
- **John 5:17** -- Quoted by Pope Eugenius—the gifts are the ongoing work of God the Father and Son.