

A Reformation Discussion of Extraordinary Predictive Prophecy Subsequent to the Closing of the Canon of Scripture

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on behalf of the Session of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton

The following document is a response to questions raised by Mike Wagner (a member of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton) regarding the position of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton on the subject of extraordinary predictive prophecy subsequent to the closing of the canon of Scripture. This is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but simply a response to specific questions asked. Though this was not initially intended for public distribution, we have received requests that it be made available to a wider audience. It is hoped that this summary of our position will aid the Church of Christ by encouraging further study of this difficult subject.

Dear Mike:

Answer to Question #1 - What is the difference between the theological position on prophecy (extra biblical revelation) of the above mentioned men of God and the present day charismatics?

Although the term "present day charismatics" is very broad, we will assume, in this answer, that you are referring to those charismatics who claim that extra biblical prophecy is both valid and binding upon modern day believers. They would assert that God is speaking with the same authority as when he speaks in Scripture, and consequently all believers should, according to them, order their lives by such so-called immediately inspired statements. Additionally, they assert that the office of prophet is ordinary and still exists.

First, we believe that the office of Prophet is extraordinary and has ceased along with the offices of Apostle and Evangelist just as it is stated in *The Second Book of Discipline* (Of the Parts of the Policy of the Kirk, and Persons or Office-Bearers to Whom the Administration Thereof is Committed), and *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government* ("Of the Officers of the Church"), both of which are subordinate standards adopted by the General Assembly of Scotland 1638-1649, inclusive.

The Second Book of Discipline, ratified by the Church of Scotland in 1578, contains the following statement, respecting the extraordinary officers in the Church:

In the New Testament and time of the evangel, he [Christ] has used the ministry of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and doctors in the administration of the word; the eldership for good order and administration of discipline; the deaconship to have the care of the ecclesiastical goods.

Some of these ecclesiastical functions are ordinary, and some extraordinary or temporary. There are three extraordinary functions: the office of the apostle, of the evangelist, and of the prophet, which are not perpetual, and now have ceased in the kirk of God, **except when he pleased extraordinarily for a time to stir some of them up again**. There are four ordinary functions or offices in the kirk of God: the office of the pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon.

These offices are ordinary, and ought to continue perpetually in the kirk, as necessary for the government and policy of the same, and no more offices ought to be received or suffered in the true kirk of God established according to his word (*The First and Second Books of Discipline*, Dallas: Presbyterian Publications, 1993; *Second Book of Discipline*, Chapter 2, *Of the Parts of the Policy of the Kirk, and Persons or Office-Bearers to Whom the Administration Thereof is Committed*, pp. 127-28, emphases added).

The Form of Presbyterial Church Government states :

The officers which Christ hath appointed for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, **some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased**. Others ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and other church-governors, and deacons (*The Form of Presbyterial Church Government*, in *The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, etc. , Inverness: Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976, p. 398, emphases added).

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, February 10, 1645, Session 16, affirms that the *Books of Discipline* are an abiding part of the covenanted uniformity sworn to be upheld in the *National and Solemn League and Covenant*:

The General Assembly being most desirous and solicitous, not only of the establishment and preservation of the form of Kirk Government in this kingdom according to the Word of God, **books of Discipline**, Acts of General Assemblies, and *National Covenant*, but also for the uniformity in Kirk Government betwixt these two kingdoms, now more straightly and strongly united by the late Solemn League and Covenant... (*The Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, 1638-1649 inclusive, p. 259, emphases added).

Furthermore, our *Terms of Communion* also bind us to affirm both the the *First and Second Books of Discipline* and *The Form of Church Government* as authoritative and agreeable to Gods Word. Term of Communion #3 states:

That Presbyterial Church Government and manner of worship are alone of divine right and unalterable; and that the most perfect model of these as yet attained, is **exhibited in the Form of Government** and Directory for Worship, adopted by the Church of Scotland in the Second Reformation.

Term #4 states:

That public, social covenanting is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament; that the National Covenant and the Solemn League are an exemplification of this divine institution; and that **these Deeds are of continued obligation upon the moral person**; and in consistency with this, that the Renovation of these Covenants at Auchensaugh, Scotland, 1712 was agreeable to the Word of God.

All these documents are cited to prove that we must own (as a part of our covenanted uniformity) that, "There are three extraordinary functions: the office of the apostle, of the evangelist, and of the prophet, which are not perpetual, and now have ceased in the kirk of God, **except when he pleased extraordinarily for a time to stir some of them up again**.

If we, in upholding the Covenants, fail to uphold the truth that God can and does extraordinarily for a time stir up some of these extraordinary prophetic functions, we would be directly contradicting the *Second Book of Discipline* and consequently be guilty of subverting the original intent of the Covenanted uniformity of the Church of Scotland (1638-1649 inclusive) as sworn in our Covenants. Additionally, we

would be guilty of unfaithfully interpreting our third and fourth terms of communion due to the fact that we have sworn to uphold the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* and our *Terms of Communion*. Desiring to adhere as faithfully as possible to the Word of God, we have no intention of denying the statements contained in these documents which we believe to be agreeable to God's Word. Consequently, all those who would wilfully and obstinately speak contrary to the same would necessarily be excluded from our Covenant Renewal and our communion table. Those who would obstinately or wilfully observe, publish, or promote the contrary doctrine would be disciplined according to the nature of their sin and removed from the membership of the church.

Seeing that our covenanted forefathers have clearly and authoritatively asserted that God does extraordinarily stir up the prophetic function beyond the time of the closing of the canon of Scripture our next task is to discuss some godly cautions and limitations to prevent extremes upon either side of this difficult question.

George Gillespie takes up a discussion of the extraordinary officers of the Church in his *Treatise of Miscellany Questions*. He holds prophets to be men "**extraordinarily inspired by the Holy Ghost, and that they are to be reckoned among these other administrations which were not to continue, or to be ordinary in the church**" (George Gillespie, *Miscellany Questions, Works*, Vol. 2, Chapter 5, section 1, point 3, p. 28).

Writing upon the subject of prophets and evangelists, Gillespie notes:

This question appears to be very perplexed and thorny, yet I am led upon it both by the controversies of the times, concerning the necessity of mission and ordination unto all ministers of holy things, and likewise by occasion of that which is maintained by some men of learning, that there are still, or may be, evangelists in the church. **Calvin holds, indeed, that in that age of his, God raised up evangelists to rescue the church from Popery,** (*Institutes*, lib. 4, cap. 3, sec. 4).

... concerning Prophets, I have before showed out of Justin Martyr (Dial. cum Tryph. Jud.) that, in his days, their were still some in the church who had an extraordinary gift of prophecy, and such there have been also in other places, and at other times; of which there might be diverse instances given.

... I say, again, the work of prophets and evangelists was extraordinary; for the distinguishing or characteristic property of a prophet, i.e., the utmost he could do which the ordinary officers could not do, nor any other but an apostle, **is the opening of great secrets, or foreshowing things to come, by the special and extraordinary inspiration of the Holy Ghost.** Their very names intimate so much, for *propheetees* and *pheeteuo* come from *propheemi*, **I foretell.**

But what is the distinguishing work and characteristic property of an evangelist, i.e. that which an ordinary pastor and teacher might not do, and which none else could do but an apostle or prophet? That I may speak to this more clearly, it is to be remembered that the word evangelist is not here taken in that restricted vulgar sense, for a penman of the Holy Ghost writing gospel, for in that sense there were but four evangelists, and two of them apostles. But this is not the Scripture notion of the word, which tells us that Philip and Timothy were evangelists, Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5; and that Christ has given evangelists to his church for the work of the ministry, Eph. 4:11-12.

Now, if we take the word as the Scripture does, the proper work of an evangelist, i.e., that which none but an evangelist, as an evangelist, or he who was more than an evangelist, could do, I conceive to stand in two things: the first is, to lay foundations of churches, and to preach Christ to an unbelieving people, who have not yet received the gospel, or at least who have not the true

doctrine of Christ among them. So Philip the evangelist preached Christ to the city of Samaria, and baptized them before any of the apostles came unto them, Acts 8:5,12. And if the seventy disciples, Luke 10, were evangelists (as many think, and Calvin, Institutes, lib. iv, cap. 3-4, thinks it probable), their proper work as evangelists was to preach the gospel to those cities which had not received it.

Their second work is a travelling and negotiating as messengers and agents upon extraordinary occasions and special emergencies, which is oftentimes between one church and another, and so distinct from the first, which is a travelling among them which are yet without. Of this second there are diverse examples in Scripture, as 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:19, 25; 2 Tim. 4:9; Titus 3:12; Acts 15:22, 25.

Now when I call these works and administrations of prophets and evangelists extraordinary, my meaning is not that they are altogether and every way extraordinary, even as apostleship; for I dare not say that since the days of the apostles there has never been, or that to the end of the world there shall never be, any raised up by God with such gifts, and for such administrations, as I have now described to be proper to prophets and evangelists, i.e., the foretelling of things to come, the travelling among unbelievers to convert them by the preaching of the gospel, and between one church and another, upon extraordinary errands. But I call the work of prophets and evangelists extraordinary in Calvin's sense (expressed by him in the place before cited), i.e., it is not ordinary like that of pastors and teachers, which has place constantly in the best constituted and settled churches. Shortly, I take the word extraordinary here, not for that which ceased with the first age of the Christian church, but for that which is not, neither needs to be, ordinary; and so much of their work (*Miscellany Questions*, Chapter 7, p. 39, emphases added).

Before moving on to other reformers it would be instructive to examine what Gillespie has just stated. First, Gillespie (agreeing with Calvin) interprets the word "extraordinary" in a limited sense.

Now when I call these works and administrations of prophets and evangelists extraordinary, my meaning is not that they are altogether and every way extraordinary, even as apostleship... But I call the work of prophets and evangelists extraordinary in Calvin's sense (expressed by him in the place before cited), i.e., it is not ordinary like that of pastors and teachers, which has place constantly in the best constituted and settled churches.

According to Gillespie and Calvin, the distinction being made is between that which is **constantly** (ordinarily) in the church and that which is **not constant** (extraordinarily) in the church. It is **not to be understood** as distinguishing between that which is **existent** after the closing of the canon of Scripture (ordinary) versus that which is **non-existent** after the closing of the canon (extraordinary). In our judgment Gillespie and Calvin are correct. This is also consistent with the above cited *Second Book of Discipline* which states that the Prophetical gifts have ceased, "**except when he pleased extraordinarily for a time to stir some of them up again.**" If the word "extraordinary", in this portion of the *Second Book of Discipline*, is made to mean "non-existent after the closing of the canon" the sentence would read as follows:

There are three non-existent functions (after the closing of the canon of Scripture): the office of the apostle, of the evangelist, and of the prophet, which are not perpetual, and now have ceased (entirely under all circumstances) in the kirk of God, **except when he pleased to make them non-existent after the closing of the canon to stir some of them up again.**

It is evident this could not be what was meant by our Scottish Reformers. In effect, this proves that the Church of Scotland was not willing to hold the position that the closing of the canon caused all

prophetic utterance to cease. Thus, arguing that the closing of the canon necessarily binds the hand of God to totally cease pouring out the extraordinary gift of prophecy upon the church is contrary to Scripture (which nowhere forbids extraordinary prophecy after the closing of the canon), contrary to our church standards (which directly allows for it), and contrary to the acknowledged historical testimony of the many of our most illustrious saints.

Moreover, notice Gillespie's reluctance to say that the extraordinary foretelling of the future has ceased with the closing of the canon:

...**for I dare not say** that since the days of the apostles there has never been, or that to the end of the world there shall never be, any raised up by God with such gifts, and for such administrations, as I have now described to be proper to prophets and evangelists, i.e., the foretelling of things to come... (George Gillespie, *Miscellany Questions*, Chapter 5, section 7, p. 30).

Though Gillespie will "dare not say" that the extraordinary gift of prophecy has ceased with the closing of the canon of Scripture, notice what he believes that he "must say":

I must say it, to the glory of God, there were in the church of Scotland, both in the time of our first reformation, and after the reformation, such extraordinary men as were more than ordinary pastors and teachers, **even holy prophets receiving extraordinary revelations from God, and foretelling diverse strange and remarkable things, which did accordingly come to pass punctually, to the great admiration of all who knew the particulars. Such were Mr. Wishart the martyr, Mr. Knox the reformer, also Mr. John Welsh, Mr. John Davidson, Mr. Robert Bruce, Mr. Alexander Simpson, Mr. Fergusson, and others.** It were too long to make a narrative here of all such particulars, and there are so many of them stupendous, that to give instance in some few, might seem to derogate from the rest, but if God give me opportunity, I shall think it worth the while to make a collection of these things (George Gillespie, *Miscellany Questions*, Vol. 2, Chapter 5, section 7, p. 30).

We understand the correct interpretation of the Second Book of Discipline and the Form of Presbyterian Church Government to be as follows:

Prophecy, understood as an immediate and ordinary revealing of new gospel truth and mysteries, such as that, 1 Cor. 14, is now ceased; and there is neither such a gift, nor such an office since the closing of the canon of Scripture. Prophecy understood as an unfathomable, extraordinary revealing of particular future events is not ceased since the closing of the canon, and such occasional mercies of God do not necessitate our countenancing those who receive such revelation as being possessors of the Scriptural gift of prophecy or the office of Prophet. Thus the vital distinction between ordinary and extraordinary prophecy is retained and the relevant portions of our church standards are reconciled.

Next we turn to Samuel Rutherford's view of the subject of internal revelation.

He divides internal revelation into the four following categories.

- (1) Prophetic revelation;
- (2) Revelation special to the elect only;
- (3) Revelation of some facts peculiar to godly men;
- (4) False and satanical revelation.

1. Prophetic revelation is that irradiation of the mind that the Holy Ghost makes on the mind and judgment of the penmen of holy scripture, whether prophets or apostles and that by an immediate inbreathing of the mind and will of God on them, whether in visions, dreams, or any

other way, **without men, or the ministry or teaching of men**, as he did to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1 or to Paul Gal. 1:1.

2. There is a **special internal revelation**, made of things in scripture, **applied in particular** to the souls of elect believers, by which, having heard and learned of the Father, Jn. 6:4; there is made known and revealed to them, by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, what is the hope of their calling, and what is the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints, Eph. 1:17-19, and that revealed to them, which flesh and blood reveals not, but the Father of Christ, Matt. 16:17. And that which the Father reveals unto babes, and hides from the wise, and prudent, Matt. 11:25-26 (Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of Spiritual Antichrist* (London, 1648), p. 39-40).

Our *Confession of Faith* speaks of this in Chapter 18:2 where, "our assurance of faith is certainty is not a bare conjectural and probably persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, **founded upon** the divine truth of the promises of salvation, **the inward evidence of those graces** unto which these promises are made, **the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God**; which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption."

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16, AV).

In this portion of the *Confession of Faith* we observe that though the Word of God is said to be the sole objective ground of our assurance, there also exists a subjective and secondary ground on which our assurance of faith is founded. There is some controversy as to what is meant by the third proposition regarding "**the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.**" The Westminster Divines differed as to what degree of "immediate witness" takes place between the Holy Spirit and the elect believer, and consequently they would only attempt to explain these mysteries by means of general propositions in our *Confession of Faith*.

Joel R. Beeke describes the differing positions held by the divines in his book entitled **Assurance of Faith**:

The Witnessing Testimony of the Spirit

Concerning proposition three in 18.2 (i.e., "the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God..."), Kendall observes:

It is not explained. It will be recalled that Paul Baynes and Richard Sibbes stressed the witness of the Spirit of adoption, but both, using circular reasoning, finally turned to the various "effects" to prove one had this witness of the Spirit. There is no indication that the divines meant what, say, John Cotton meant - an immediate witness, although they might have allowed this possibility (Robert Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, 1979, p.205)

Kendall is correct in asserting that proposition three in 18.2 is not explained, but not accurate in implying that none of the Confession's divines affirmed the kind of direct witness John Cotton advocated.

The Westminster divines knew that the witnessing of the Holy Spirit was the most difficult ground of assurance to comprehend. They freely confessed that "amazing variety" and vast mysteries surrounded them when they spoke of the leadings of the Spirit and how He dwells in believers. One significant reason the assembly did not detail more specifically what the Spirit's testimony is in assurance was to **allow for the freedom of the Spirit** in His

assuring witness. A second, interwoven reason was that the assembly desired to allow **freedom of conscience to the divines actually present who varied in their opinions** concerning some of the finer details of the Spirit's testimony. These may be relegated to three groups.

In the first group are those divines, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, Anthony Burgess, and George Gillespie, who regard proposition three [the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God-PRCE] as part and parcel of proposition two [the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made-PRCE] That is to say, they view the witnessing testimony of the Holy Spirit in assurance as **referring exclusively to His activity within the syllogisms, whereby He brings conscience to unite with His witness that the Christian is a child of God**. According to this view Romans 8:15 and 8:16 are regarded as synonymous: the witness of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined with the witness of the believer's spirit. For these divines, the breakdown of secondary grounds of assurance is really non-existent, **as the inward evidence of grace and the testimony of the Spirit are essentially one**. The syllogisms are "full" assurance. In each case, these divines felt this view was important to **maintain in opposition to mysticism and antinomianism** which are prone to accent a direct testimony of the Spirit devoid of the necessity of bringing forth practical fruits of faith and repentance.

In the second group are those divines (such as Rutherford, Twisse, Scudder, and Goodwin) who believe that the witness of the Spirit described in Romans 8:15 contains **something in addition** to that of verse 16. **This group distinguishes the Spirit witnessing with the believer's spirit by syllogism from His witnessing to the believer's spirit by direct applications of the Word**. As Meyer points out, the former leaves in its wake the self-conscious conviction, "**I am a child of God**," and on the basis of such Spirit-worked syllogisms finds freedom to approach God as Father. The latter speaks the Spirit's pronouncement on behalf of the Father, "**You are a child of God**," and on this basis of hearing of its sonship **from God's own Word by the Spirit**, proceeds to approach Him with the familiarity of a child. Henry Scudder's breakdown of the Spirit's witness is typical of this second group:

This Spirit does witness to a man, that he is the child of God, two ways: First, By **immediate witness and suggestion**. Secondly, By necessary inferences, by signs from the infallible fruits of the said Spirit (Henry Scudder, *The Christians Daily Walk*, p. 338)

This second group differs among themselves on whether **the Spirit's direct testimony** should be regarded as more spontaneous, durable, and powerful than His syllogistic testimony. The most common approach is similar to **Rutherford's which allows for the direct testimony**, but then stresses that the reflex act of faith is as a rule "more spiritual and helpful" than are direct acts. Consequently, all believers should be regularly praying for the Spirit's illumination to guide them into syllogistic conclusions. Twisse and Scudder distinguish the Spirit's testifying with our spirit from His witnessing of personal adoption without determining which is most valuable. Goodwin asserts, however, that **the direct witness of the Spirit** far supersedes the co-witnessing through the syllogisms. For him, "full" assurance is more than discursive; **it is also intuitive**. Generally speaking, however, **this second group does not conceive of the direct testimony of the Spirit as being independent of the syllogisms, but as "superadded" to them**. They are agreed that the syllogistic way of reaching assurance is more common and probably safer: **Some Divines do not indeed deny the possibility of such an immediate Testimony**, but yet they conclude the ordinary and safe way, is, to look for that Testimony, which is by the effects, and fruits of Gods Spirit.

The third group, which may be regarded as a subset of the second theologically, places the event of **"immediate" assurance by direct witness of the Holy Spirit** on a higher level practically. Some Westminster divines, such as **William Bridge and Samuel Rutherford**,

belonging to the second group, believe that such assurance becomes the portion of many Christians before they die. Others, however, such as Thomas Goodwin, influenced by the Dutch Second Reformation and the Cotton-Preston tradition in Puritanism, place this experience far above the pale of the ordinary believer. In fact, Goodwin states that the experience of full assurance pronounced by the Spirit "immediately" is so profound that it is comparable to "a new conversion". For Goodwin this "full" assurance is the zenith of experimental life. Unlike the position adopted by the majority in the second group, such assurance is divorced from the syllogisms entirely:

This witness is immediate, that is, it builds not his testimony on anything in us; it is not a testimony fetched out of a man's self, or the work of the Spirit in man, as the others were; for the Spirit speaks not by his effects, **but speaks from himself** (*The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 8:366)

Goodwin repeatedly uses terminology such as immediate light, joy unspeakable, transcendent, glorious, and intuitive in describing the experience of full assurance. Indeed, it is beyond human description:

Those who have attained it cannot demonstrate it to others, especially not to those who have not experience of it, for it is a white stone which no one knows but he that receives it, Rev. 2:17 (*The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 8:351)

Both **English and Dutch divines** have frequently denominated such a "**transcendent experience**" as "**justification in the court of conscience**," which emphasized being pronounced forgiven by the Father and being sealed by the Spirit unto full restoration with God. For descriptive purposes, it also was common to speak in terms of **a mutual experiential embrace between God as Father and the believer as the overwhelmed child.**

As Petrus Immens writes:

The other may be called extraordinary [i.e., in relation to ordinary assurance gained through syllogism- JRB] and is experienced when God... manifests his satisfaction in them, by making it known to them that he views them as the children of his love and as such delights in them...The believer is overwhelmed with a sense of divine love. Now Jesus takes him in his arms and embraces him;-now he gives a seal as an evidence of his being a child of God... **At this time also the Spirit imparts such a full radiance of knowledge that he beholds with open face the glory of the Lord and is enraptured with the bright prospect before him....** At this time the Spirit draws the curtain so that the believer gets a view of heaven itself, as the blissful place in which he is forever to dwell, and obtains a prelibation of that happiness which is in reserve for him after death (*The Pious Communicant Encouraged*, pp. 95, 96, 104, 105)

In every sense, however, these three groups are united in asserting that the Spirit's testimony is always tied to, and may never contradict, the Word of God. "The Spirit is promised in the Word, and that promise is fulfilled in experience. **All the Westminster divines are most anxious to avoid antinomianism on the one hand, as well as to protect the freedom of the Spirit on the other.**

In sum, for the divines of the Westminster Assembly, all three grounds of 18:2-faith in God's promises, inward evidences of grace, and the witness of the Spirit-must be pursued to obtain as full a measure of assurance as possible by the grace of God. **If any of these grounds are unduly emphasized at the expense of others, the whole teaching of assurance becomes imbalanced or even dangerous. No Puritan of the stature of Westminster's assembly of**

divines would teach that assurance is obtainable from trusting in the promises alone, by self-examination alone, or by the witness of the Holy Spirit alone. Rather, the Puritans taught that the believer cannot truly trust the promises without the aid of the Holy Spirit, and that he cannot with any degree of safety look to himself without the enabling enlightenment of the Spirit. Although the Puritanism of the Confession's divines gave the syllogisms a more intrinsic role in assurance and placed greater emphasis upon them than did Calvin, the promises of God continued to be regarded as the primary ground for assurance.

At every point in true assurance, the activity of the Spirit is essential. **Without the application of the Spirit, the promises of God lead to self-deceit and fruitless lives. Without the enlightening of the Spirit, self-examination tends to introspection, bondage, and legalism. The witness of the Spirit, divorced from the promises of God and from scriptural self-examination, is prone to reap unbiblical mysticism and excessive emotionalism.** For the WCF, these three great strands belong together (*Joel Beeke, Assurance of Faith*, pp. 169-173).

The Session of the Puritan Reformed Church believes that the balanced and more general approach taken by Westminster divines upon this topic allows for a wise and acceptable diversity of opinion within our covenanted unity of doctrine and uniformity of practice. Striving against excessive and mystical Antinomianism on the one hand, and against a sinful and unscriptural limiting of the Holy Spirit's freedom on the other, we maintain that each of the three propositions noted in WCF 18:2 are to be understood as a unit-one aspect not being unduly emphasized over the other. As Mr. Beeke has correctly pointed out **"In every sense, however, these three groups are united in asserting that the Spirit's testimony is always tied to, and may never contradict, the Word of God."** Consequently, those who take a more objective approach and those who see the working of the Spirit playing a more prominent and direct role in the assurance of a believer's faith may dwell together in concord-both groups falling within the orthodox parameters of this portion of the Confession. Whatever differences we may emphasize regarding the means by which we may know that we have eternal life, our agreement consists in the fact that our assurance is an infallible assurance brought about by all three propositions working in harmony-none entirely excluded.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know** that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13, AV).

This is also relevant to our present question respecting extraordinary revelation since the closing of the canon of Scripture. We must recognize that some diversity of opinion and emphasis may exist within orthodox parameters-especially where our limited perception of the secret working of the Spirit of God is involved. We will not easily fall into the snare of requiring the judgment of mere men to coincide in every particular so long as we maintain that the Spirit of God speaking in His holy Word is the final judge of controversy. As the divines above wisely demonstrate, sometimes it is enough to agree upon more general parameters while allowing a diversity of emphasis concerning the particular means used by God in accomplishing his glorious purpose. This ought to be kept in mind throughout this discussion.

We now proceed to Rutherford's third category of internal revelation-Revelation of some facts peculiar to godly men:

3. There is a 3rd revelation of some particular men, who have foretold things to come **even since the ceasing of the canon of the word**, as John Huss, Wycliffe, Luther, have foretold things to come, and they certainly fell out. And in our nation of Scotland, Mr. George Wishart foretold that Cardinal Beaton should not come out alive at the gates of the Castle of St. Andrews, but that he should die a shameful death; and he [Beaton-PRCE] was hanged over the window that he did look out at, when he saw the man of God [Wishart-PRCE] burnt. Mr. Knox prophesied of the hanging of the Lord of Grange. Mr. John Davidson uttered prophesies, known to many of

the kingdom, diverse holy and mortified preachers in England have done the like (Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of Spiritual Antichrist*, London, 1648, p. 42).

Rutherford's position is clear enough. He forthrightly affirms that extraordinary revelation has occurred since the closing of the canon.

Lastly, Rutherford attacks the excess and abuse of the heretics of his day as he describes his fourth and final category of internal revelation-false and satanical revelation:

4. No Familists, or Antinomians - no David George, nor H. Nicholas, no man ever of that gang, Randel or Wheelwright, or Den, or any other - that ever I heard of, being once engaged in the familistical way, ever did utter any but the fourth sort of lying and false inspirations. Mrs. Hutchison said she should be delivered from the Court of Boston miraculously as Daniel from the lions, which proved false. Becold prophesied of the deliverance of the town of Munster which was delivered to their enemies, and he and his prophet were tortured and hanged. David George prophesied of the raising of himself from the dead, which was never fulfilled (Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of Spiritual Antichrist*, London, 1648, p. 42).

Rutherford now turns to the heart of our question as he differentiates between extraordinary revelation of some facts peculiar to godly men and false and Satanic revelation.

Now the differences between the third and fourth revelations, I place in these:

1. These worthy Reformers did tie no man to believe their prophecies as scriptures. [This observation is paramount and must be maintained in all circumstances-PRCE]. We are to give faith to the predictions of prophets and apostles, foretelling facts to come, as to the very word of God; they [the reformers-PRCE] never gave themselves out as organs immediately inspired by the Holy Ghost, as the prophets do, and as Paul did, Rom. 11, prophesying the calling of the Jews; Rev 1:10, and through the whole book. Yea, they never denounced judgment against those that believe not their predictions, of these particular events and facts as they are such particular events and facts, as the prophets and apostles did. [Here Rutherford puts these predictions in a lower class than the prophesying of those immediately inspired by the Holy Ghost. Men are not bound to believe them, nor are men who doubt to be denounced or disciplined-they are not a binding or obliging rule-PRCE]. But Mrs. Hutchison said (Rise, Reign, p. 61, art. 27): That her particular revelations about future events were as infallible as any scripture, and that she is bound as much to believe them as the scripture, for the same Holy Ghost is author of both. Familists take the word preached for the printed inky letter, or the airy, dead sound of the gospel. We take it for letter and sound of preaching, as it includes the thing signified: to wit, Christ, and all his promises, in which sense the sounding of the gospel heard works many years after it is preached; and the word long ago preached may be waked up by a sad affliction, **an inspiration from God**, and produce the work of conversion, and still it is the word of truth in the scripture that produces faith and is the same seed that lies many months under the clod and grows and brings forth fruit after. And we know Antinomians reject the scriptures and build all upon inward revelations, as their binding and obliging rule.

2. The events revealed to godly and sound witnesses of Christ are not contrary to the word. [This is another invariable rule-PRCE]. But Becold, John Mathie, and John Schykerm (who killed his brother for no fault) and other enthusiasts, of that murdering spirit Satan, who killed innocent men, expressly against the sixth commandment, Thou shalt not kill; and taught the Boors of Germany to rise and kill all lawful magistrates, because they were magistrates; upon the pretence and impulses and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, were activated by inspirations against the word of God. All that the godly Reformers foretold of the tragic ends of the proclaimed enemies of gospel-they were not actors themselves in murdering these enemies of God; nor would Mr. Wishart command or approve that Norman and John Leslie should kill the

Cardinal Beaton as they did.

3. They had a general rule going along that evil shall hunt the wicked man: only a secret harmless, but an extraordinary strong impulse, or a scripture-spirit leading them, carried them to apply a general rule of divine justice, in their predictions, to particular godless men, they themselves only being foretellers, not co-partners of the act. [Rutherford defines the valid kind of extraordinary revelation as "a strong impulse" or "scripture spirit leading them." It is noteworthy that he steers clear and even denounces the idea that these prophecies are immediately inspired. It appears that Rutherford asserts that the Spirit of God extraordinarily exercises a man's intuition and Scriptural predisposition to inform him of future events by causing men to apply general rules of divine justice, rather than communicating this information directly by an audible voice or ecstatic vision. Rutherford's explanation is plausible and safe, but because of the unsearchable nature of the actual dynamic involved is not necessarily conclusive-PRCE].

4. They [the Reformers-PRCE] were men sound in the faith opposite to Popery, Prelacy, Socinianism, Papism, lawless enthusiasm, Antinomianism, Arminianism, Arianism, and what else is contrary to sound doctrine. All these being wanting in such as hold this fourth sort of revelations, we cannot judge them but Satanical characters. [Here another sound general rule is proposed. Those claiming to prophecy, who are otherwise unsound in doctrine and practice, are definitely not to be countenanced as being led of the Spirit of God in their predictions-PRCE].

(1) They are not pure and harmless; but thrust men upon the bloody and wicked practices forbidden by God. Though God bade Abraham kill his only son for him, to try his obedience, yet God countermanded him, and would not have him act accordingly. These spirits actually kill the innocent upon a pretended Spirit's impulse.

(2) They have no rule of the word to countenance them, and if they lead men from the law and the testimony, it is because there is no light in them, Isa. 8:20.

(3) These revelations lodge in men of rotten and corrupt minds destitute of the truth, and they are opposite and destructive to sanctification.

(4) They argue the scriptures to be imperfect, and to be a lame and maneked directory, of faith and manners, contrary to the scriptures, Ps. 19:7-9; 2 Tim. 3:15-16; Luke 16:30-31; John 20:30-31; Acts 26:22; Ps. 119:105, etc.

(5) Then the scripture shall not decide all controverted truths, nor be that by which we shall find the truth and the rule of trying the spirits, whether they be of God, or not, contrary to 1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21; and contrary to the laudable example of the noble Bereans, who tried Paul's doctrine by the scriptures, Acts 17:11.

(6) Christ's knocks and stirrings on the heart, sounds and breathes the breathings of God in his word; the devil's knock is a dumb and dead knock and is destitute of the word of truth.

(7) Men do and act all things from their own spirit, and walk in the light of their own sparks and there is no end of erring and wandering from God, when they act by no certain known rule of the word (Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of Spiritual Antichrist*, London, 1648, p. 43, 44).

Next, we cite a portion of James Durham's, *Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation*.

There is much spoken of prophesying in this book [Revelation], and of prophets, chapter 11; and Jezebel, chapter 2 is reproved for taking to her the name of a prophetess. And here the reviving of prophecy is spoken of in this chapter. It may be enquired then, how these places are to be

understood? **And if prophesying may be now expected in the church? Or, if that gift has now fully ceased? or in what respect?**

We consider prophecy or prophets, in a **threefold consideration**:

1. In respect of the matter that is brought forth: which is either,

(1.) Some general truth **not formerly revealed in the word.** Or,

(2.) Some particular, **contrary to** what is formerly revealed there, either in doctrine or practice. Of this kind might be the Israelites' borrowing of jewels, Abraham's taking of his son to sacrifice him, and many such practices which cannot be condemned, yet do not agree with the precepts that are in the word for directing of the people of God in their ordinary carriage. Or,

(3.) It is some particular, neither formerly revealed, nor yet in itself contrary to the word, but that which **concerns some particular event, or personal duty** allenarly [only].

2. We may consider it again, as it holds forth an **ordinary or extraordinary** way, how these things, or any thing else, come to be known, although the matter be a truth formerly revealed in the word, such as the matter revealed to these prophets, 1 Cor. 14, which was to be tried by the word.

3. It may be considered, **in respect of the proposing of what is revealed to others, to be a direction, or, to rule them in their practice**, and that either by recording it as scripture, as some of the prophets of old did, or, by taking an office or authority, and by virtue of that to do it. Or otherwise, we may answer in these assertions.

Assert. 1. There is now no gift of prophecy, either for the bringing forth of any truth not formerly delivered, nor any gift to warrant one in a particular, simply condemned in the word, as to take another's goods, life, station, etc., so as to be warranted merely by such a revelation in things otherwise unlawful, as it is like prophetic men of old, in some of their practices were, which to us are no precedent for our warrant; which appears,

(1.) Because now the word is complete, furnished with truths, to make the man of God perfect for every good work, and that in respect of the last administration of the covenant; there is, therefore, **no access to the adding of any new matter.**

(2.) Because, if any other gospel, or duty, **contrary to this word** which we have received, be preached, **we are not to receive it**, but to account him accursed that carries it, under whatsoever pretext he do it, if he were an angel; and **this leaves no place for admitting either of truths, or duties, contrary to the word**, Gal. 1.

(3.) The commination [threatening-PRCE] added in the close of this book [Revelation-PRCE], chapter 22, confirms this, there being the same reason against adding unto, or detracting from the scriptures in general, or any part of them, as there is in reference to this book, all of them being of the same authority, yet is it not without weight added to this as the close of all.

(4.) The gifts of prophecies, being now **generally ceased**, as afterward will be clear, and the Lord having thought more mediately and solidly, as it is called a more sure word of prophesy, 2 Pet. 1:19, to feed his church, viz. by his word; and he having given now much more scripture under the gospel than under the law, **to supply the want of immediately inspired prophets**; and, considering how rare the examples of God's calling for duties seemingly contrary to moral commands are, and what absurdities would follow, if now any such gift should be pretended unto,

in reference to such matter. We conceive it therefore **safe and necessary to conclude**, that there is now, **after reformation** [Heb. 9:10], **no such gift of prophecy, or prophets, to be expected or admitted, who may add any new truth to the word, or command any new duty contrary to it**, by arrogating to themselves, or imposing something as duty on others, which the moral grounds of the word do not allow of; and it is confirmed by this, that we are commanded to try the spirits; and **even the revelations of extraordinary prophets, 1 Cor. 14, were to be tried and judged: which can be by no rule, but by the word. It follows, therefore, that no revelation, containing anything contrary to the word, is to be admitted or received as from the Spirit of the Lord.**

Assert. 2. Yet it is not altogether to be denied, but that the Lord may, in particulars of the last kind, sometimes, reveal himself to some, by foretelling events before they come, such as the famine that Agabus foretold of, or Paul's imprisonment were; of such the history of the martyrs and saints do sometimes make mention: and particularly, Athanasius is often advertised of hazards, as is recorded, and in the verity cannot be denied; and of this sort there were many at the reviving of the light of the gospel who, by foretelling of particular events, were famous, as John Huss's foretelling, within a hundred years after him, to follow the outbreking of reformation; such, it is likely, was Hieronymus Savonarola, who was burnt by the Pope, not as was pretended, for foretelling of events, as they imputed to him, by unlawful means, but for faithful reproving of his faults, as he is described by Philip de Cumius, and other authors: of such many were in this land, as Messrs. Wishart, Knox, Welch, Davidson, etc.. And this cannot be said altogether to be made void: for, although God has now closed the canon of scripture, yet that he should be restrained in his freedom, from manifesting of himself thus, there is no convincing ground to bear it out, especially when experience has often proven the contrary in the most holy men.

Yet, **(1)** This is **not habitual or ordinary to any**, but is **singular** at some **few** times, and in some **few** cases.

(2) Every persuasion of mind before the event comes, and answerableness in it when it comes, will not be sufficient to make it pass for a prophetical foreknowledge, more than when in dreams it may often so fall out.

(3) This will **not denominate one to be a prophet**, although, in some singular events, God makes this use of him. Nor,

(4) Can such predictions warrant any to do a thing as a duty, which otherwise would not be warrantable unto them.

(5) There is **difference** to be put betwixt the **simple foretelling of an event**, which may be of God, and **a conclusion which may be drawn therefrom**; this may be of ourselves, as we may see in the predictions of these, Acts 21 [vs. 11-PRCE], who foretold of Paul's imprisonment at Jerusalem, yet was not that to divert him from his going there, as many collected; that therefore was not from God, as Paul's pressure in the spirit to go notwithstanding, does clear; **every such prediction therefore cannot be made a rule of duty**, seeing the Lord may have other good ends of trial, advertisement and confirmation in it. **And we will not find, that any have made use of such particular revelations, as from them to press a duty upon others, that would not otherwise be warrantable, although, when it concurs with other grounds, it may have its weight for swaying in lawful things.**

Assert. 3. Prophecy, taken for an immediate revealing of gospel truth and mysteries, such

as that, 1 Cor. 14, and what was frequent in the apostolic times, is now ceased; and there is neither such a gift, nor such an office:

(1.) There is not such a gift; for it is not common to all that are renewed; it was not so in the apostles' days; there were diversities of gifts; and **this gift is distinguished from saving grace**, 1 Cor. 12, and 14, etc., neither is that particular gift of prophecy continued; for, there is no other gift continued, as these of healing, tongues, and interpretations, whereby men may come in an immediate way to the exercise of these. And,

(2.) Experience shows, that that has ceased, and God calls men to the use of ordinary means for the attaining of the knowledge of his will; and there being now no such gift that will abide trial, there is therefore no such office to be pleaded for, that follows upon that; yet even **these prophets, in the matter prophesied by them, were to be tried by the word and judged**; and, in the gift, if it were a revelation indeed, 1 Cor. 14. Now, there being none such who can abide that proof, we are not, at least, without that, to acknowledge such a gift, or such an office.

Assert. 4. Yet, if we take prophecy for the understanding of God's mind, and for attaining to be well acquainted with the mysteries of God, by a **mediate way**; yea, and that beyond the applied means, or to have a gift and capacity for discerning of these things with little pains, and that beyond what some others can attain unto by any labor, we conceive, **that in this sense prophecy, and prophets, may be said to be continued in the church**; and such God raised up in the time of reformation, men singularly gifted with a prophetic spirit in this sense, which may be the fulfilling of this prophesied in this chapter [Rev. 10].

Assert. 5. No gift of prophecy now can warrant one **authoritatively** to set down his light, although it be truth, as canonical scripture, or as of **equal authority** from itself with the writings of Moses, etc., and other scriptures, that in the first assertion was cast, though one, by his gift, may reason from, or genuinely open these scriptures by writ, as by word.

Assert. 6. No gift can warrant one to take on him the office of an authoritative preacher, even though, in some particulars, God's mind extraordinarily should be revealed to him; for, it is not the gift that gives the authority of an office, but God's authoritative mission; otherwise a woman, as Philip's daughters, might be an officer in the church, and have public access to preach and teach, which yet the New Testament admits not, even when it speaks of this gift of prophecy, 1 Cor. 14, and orders the practice of extraordinary prophets; there, this inhibition is inferred, and elsewhere; yea, even in these primitive times, there was a trial of spirits and gifts by the prophets, before any was to be accounted such: beside, one may have a particular event revealed to him, who yet may be more unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel than others, who, by God's blessing, have attained to knowledge in an ordinary way; and if it cannot warrant an office to such, neither will it do in this case: **there is now therefore no prophet by an immediate call.**

Assert. 7. Yet we say, that as God, by gifts, may furnish some in a more than ordinary way; so may he, and uses he to thrust them out in a mixed way to the exercise of these for the edification of his church, and make the seal of his call extraordinarily ratify his sending of them, that is, as he may furnish men partly by means, and especially by his blessing, extraordinarily accompanying them out, partly in a mediate way, by men's opening of the door, partly by his more than ordinary thrusting of them out, making up so what was defective in his mediate call, by some extraordinary concurrences of impulse and gifts within, of circumstances of providence without, and of efficacy upon, and acceptance of it amongst others, by which it is ratified. This the Lord fulfilled at the entry of the reformation, raising up men comparatively, extraordinarily furnished and commissioned for his work, yet still ministers of the same gospel, and walking according to the common rule with others in their ministerial charge; this is **not ordinarily to be**

imitated, but where the like cases, call, and circumstances concur; and thus the Lord in old stirred up men at times of reformation, to take on them the furtherance of his work, who yet were not properly extraordinary prophets, or officers, or Levites; nor ordinarily called magistrates, as Nehemiah, Ezra, and others, who did both differ from Haggai, Zechariah, and such who were properly called prophets on the one hand, and from Joshua, Zerubbabel, and such who were ordinarily and properly priests and magistrates on the other; which yet in ordinary and settled conditions was not done (James Durham, *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation*, Glasgow, 1788 edition, cited from SWRB bound photocopy, Vol. 2., pp. 219-224).

We as a session agree with each of the general rules and assertions laid out above by these worthy Reformers.

Answer to Question #2 - What is the explicit Scriptural teaching that underlies and justifies what those men of God did? Why should I believe that extra-biblical revelation can still occur?

This is not a regulative principle issue and consequently, in our judgment, it is not necessary to find an explicit commandment, valid inference or an approved example to justify this position. However, a brief discussion of this topic may be useful to demonstrate our reasoning.

I. Explicit command or prohibition

We are not aware of an explicit commandment necessarily requiring the use of prophecy (i.e. predicting the future) in our present day. We also do not have an explicit prohibition of the same.

II. Valid inference.

One relevant text which indicates extraordinary prophesying (the foretelling of particular events and judgments of God upon the wicked) to take place subsequent to the closing of the canon is Revelation 11:3:

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. **And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.** These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. **These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.** And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Revelation 11:1-7, AV).

In this text the two witnesses are said to prophecy for a period equal to 1260 years, which is to be understood of a time subsequent to the closing of the canon of Scripture. These two witnesses, symbolic characters exhibiting the moral person of the mystical Church of Christ, are said to prophecy in such a manner as to restrain the rain, turn waters to blood, and smite the earth with plagues as often as they will.

David Steele comments:

The witnesses prophecy 1260 years. But since no individual persons live so long, a succession must be supposed. They are in fact mystic characters, having their real counterpart in actual

history (David Steele, *The Two Witnesses*, Appendix H, p. 315, cited from the forthcoming book *Notes on the Apocalypse*).

The witnesses are a competent number of Christians who for 1260 years, insist upon the **application of God's Word** to church and state; and who testify against all communities who rebel against the Lord Christ (*Notes on the Apocalypse*, p. 133).

Steele notes that the same resources allotted to the Prophets of the past are secured by the two witnesses-by virtue of the promise of the Holy Ghost. Like Moses and Elijah, these two witnesses testify for the truth, and against error. By faith these witnesses receive the necessary endowments to accomplish great things upon the earth. It is in this sense that their prophecy (both ordinary and extraordinary testimony bearing) is said to restrain the rain, turn waters to blood, and smite the earth with plagues. By means of the power of God upon their words and actions these two witnesses- "a competent number of Christians who for 1260 years, insist upon the application of God's Word to church and state; who testify against all communities who rebel against the Lord Christ"-lead the faithful to the land of promise, bring to nought the Pharaoh's and Ahab's that rise up against the truth, and ultimately testify that the judgment of God will crush the life out of Antichrist:

Second in exercising their right of prophesying, these witnesses have the promise of the Holy Ghost! Be not alarmed candid reader, **there is not intention here to plead for any addition to our Bible, or any new rule of faith and practice: but these witnesses are nevertheless, to be "men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost"** otherwise they would be utterly incompetent to the work assigned. **Accordingly, having Abel's, Moses', Elijah's, Stephen's work allotted to them; they have the same resources secured in the promise** (*The Two Witnesses*, p. 341)

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist (Luke 21:15, AV).

And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you (Matthew 10:18-20, AV).

Steele wisely guards against the interpretation that the prophesying spoken of in Revelation 11:3 is immediately inspired and on par with Scripture. Rather he asserts that the nature of the prophecy spoken by the two witnesses consisted in their applying existing predictions and general principles of Scripture to their appropriate objects. This agrees with the assertion of Rutherford who speaks of the extraordinary predictions of John Huss, Wycliffe, Luther etc.:

They had a general rule going along that evil shall hunt the wicked man: only a secret harmless, but an extraordinary strong impulse, or a scripture-spirit leading them, carried them to apply a general rule of divine justice, in their predictions, to particular godless men, they themselves only being foretellers, not co-partners of the act (Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of Spiritual Antichrist*, London, 1648, p. 43, 44).

Durham also concurs when he says:

Yet, if we take prophecy for the understanding of God's mind, and for attaining to be well acquainted with the mysteries of God, **by a mediate way; yea, and that beyond the applied means**, or to have a gift and capacity for discerning of these things with little pains, and that beyond what some others can attain unto by any labor, we conceive, **that in this sense prophecy, and prophets, may be said to be continued in the church**; and such God raised up in the time of reformation, men singularly gifted with a prophetic spirit in this sense, which

may be the fulfilling of this prophesied in this chapter [Rev. 10-PRCE] (James Durham, *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation*, Glasgow, 1788 edition, cited from SWRB bound photocopy, Vol. 2., p. 223).

In the following citations we observe that Steele is equally set against granting that the extraordinary prophecy of the two witnesses is "inspired" in the formal sense of the word:

These witnesses "prophecy," **not as being inspired**, but because they-and they only-**apply existing predictions to their appropriate objects**, so far as they receive light from him who is "the light of the world"(David Steele, *Notes on the Apocalypse*, p. 132).

Let us never lose sight of the fact, that these witnesses cease not to prophecy-**to apply the Scriptures, especially the prophetic parts of them**, during the whole period of 1260 years: that is while they live (David Steele, *Notes on the Apocalypse*, p. 133).

This point is of the greatest moment, since not one word uttered by these two witnesses is inspired in the proper and formal sense of inspiration (David Steele, *The Two Witnesses*, p. 336)!

Steele insists that the cause at issue is divine truth, all the precious doctrines of the Bible, together with their faithful application. The two witnesses, like the reformers of the First and Second Reformation, rely upon their intimate knowledge of prophecy by ordinary means (preaching) and by extraordinary means (foretelling particular events and judgments of God upon the wicked) to pronounce the sentence of God upon Antichrist and his followers. By ordinary (preaching) and extraordinary (foretelling future events) means "fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies" and they "have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues"-for it is not they that speak, but the Spirit of their Father which speaketh in them; it is they and they alone who are given a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. By their mouths true doctrine is promulgated and by their practical wisdom godly practice is advanced.

These witnesses cannot maintain their position against Antichristian opposition, unless they fall back on Old Testament authority. The whole outline of their testimony, as given in the book of Revelation, demonstrates their familiarity with, and reliance upon, the authority of the Old Testament, especially prophecy, since their business is to prophecy. As their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, so it is built on the foundation not merely of Apostles, but also of Prophets, Eph. 2:20. The faith of God's elect, and an acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness go together, Titus 1:1 (*The Two Witnesses*, p. 335).

Furthermore, James Durham observes that in this portion of Scripture, the "prophecy" and "testimony" of the two witnesses are inseparably bound together. When comparing Rev. 11:3 ("and they shall prophecy") with Rev. 11:7 ("And when they shall have finished their testimony"), Durham rightly concludes that the means (prophecy) leads to the end (testimony) and thus the two ideas, though distinct in and of themselves, are to be considered as mutually inclusive in this connection. The relevance of this observation lies in the fact that it is necessary to establish that all the prophesying of the two witnesses (both ordinary and extraordinary) is to be included as part of their testimony, if we are to infer that this text warrants the use of extraordinary revelation after the closing of the canon. Once it is established (which has already been established by Rutherford, Durham, Gillespie, etc.) that the prophecy of the two witnesses includes the foretelling of particular events we may reasonably conclude that Scripture allows for this to happen during the 1260 days (i.e. beyond the closing of the canon).

When ministers have most to do and meet with most opposition, God often furnisheth them accordingly with more boldness, gifts, and assistance than ordinary. Christ's witnesses are a

terrible party: for as few as these witnesses are, none of their opposites do gain at their hand; whoever hurteth them shall in this manner be killed... When they [the two witnesses-PRCE] have finished their testimony, or were about to finish their testimony; for it is within the term of Antichrist's height, that this is done: **what is called prophecy before is called testimony here [Rev 11:7-PRCE]**: because for that end they were to testify and preach (James Durham, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p.252, 253, emphases added).

Notice in the following citation how Durham associates the extraordinary prophetic foretelling of future events with Martin Luther's extraordinary effectiveness in prayer. This is especially relevant considering that Durham is identifying Luther (and consequently Calvin, Knox, Wishart, Bruce, etc.) as those who are given extraordinary assistance and success in denouncing the judgments of God against Antichrist and his followers-as God had done through Moses and Elijah.

Lastly it is marked that it was given them [the two witnesses-PRCE] thus to do [prophecy, in Rev. 11:3. **And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.** -PRCE], which holdeth forth the special commission they had, that not only to enter into that station but also to continue therein, implying with all assistance and success beyond what could be expected in the discharging of their testimony. **This power looketh especially to the authority that God hath given them to denounce His judgments against Antichrist's followers with the certainty of the event thereof**, and that both temporal in due time to be fulfilled, but eternal always according to that denunciation (Rev 14:6, 10); "as often as they will" is not to be understood as if they had committed it to them at their arbitrament to the use of the keys; even extraordinary prophets did not work miracles and prophecy in foretelling of events at their pleasure or by any habitual power, but when and where it pleased the Lord to bring such effects, but it holdeth forth the supremacy and dependency of their power as to men, they were to exercise thereof no ways subordinate to the beast that the world admired and so holdeth forth with respect, and court to speak so which they have with God, **he will refuse them no good thing and make good all his words spoken by them, as He had done in the persons of Moses and Elijah and theses alluded unto; for which cause, these expressions are especially used, Just. Jonas useth such an expression of Luther's effectualness in prayer that quicquid voluit potuit, [loosely interpreted-whatsoever asked for is obtained-PRCE] which is upon the matter agreeable to what is said here** (James Durham, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Vol. 1, p. 246, 247).

This interpretation of Rev 11:3 does not "explicitly" prove that the prophesying spoken of was an extraordinary foretelling of the future, but it does "implicitly" allow for men full of the Holy Ghost to speak the truth, apply the Scripture, and testify against the error of Antichrist. This testimony is the Spirit of the Father speaking in His witnesses and inevitably this testimony does sometimes take the form of extraordinarily foretelling future events or judgments of God upon His enemies. If the prophesying of the two witnesses is properly understood to include all the precious doctrines of the Bible and their faithful application, we must necessarily include their entire testimony (which includes extraordinary foretelling of future events and judgments by the reformers of the First and Second Reformation). Thus, by inference, the extraordinary foretelling of future events and judgments of God upon the wicked must be allowed subsequent to the closing of the canon. This inference is both good and necessary unless one would wish to exclude the testimony of the leaders of the First and Second Reformation on the basis that they sinned by allowing extraordinary predictions of particular events to continue past the closing of the canon. Though their extraordinary foretelling of the future was not inspired in the formal sense of the word, God used these means to manifest that He was speaking the truth through them, providentially protecting them, and answering their prayers in an extraordinary fashion. This establishes one instance of an inference from Scripture allowing for extraordinary foretelling of future events after the closing of the canon.

Next, Gillespie notes:

... although such prophets be extraordinary, and but seldom raised up in the church, yet there have been, I dare say, not only in primitive times, but amongst our first reformers and others; and upon what Scripture can we pitch for such extraordinary prophets, if not upon those scriptures which are applied by some to the prophesying brethren, or gifted church members? (George Gillespie, *Miscellany Questions*, Vol. 2, Chapter 5, section 7, p. 30).

In the following sections (points 8-13, pp. 30, 31, of *Miscellany Questions*) Gillespie proceeds to further examine the Scriptural argument for allowing extraordinary prophecy subsequent to the closing of the canon. We refer you to that portion of his book for further study.

Thus, the use of a valid inference would, in our judgment, favour the side of allowing for extraordinary prophecy of particular events subsequent to the closing of the canon. We may reasonably infer that God has not bound himself from blessing the church by means of extraordinarily providing his saints with information about specific future events for the following reasons:

1. Scripture has nowhere explicitly stated that God would cease to manifest his grace in this way.
2. God ordinarily manifests similar graces to his children in the areas of prayer and assurance of faith.
3. God has manifested this grace to the church's greatest reformers during her best and purest times.

III. Approved example

Though we do have many approved examples of prophecy in the New Testament (Acts 21:11, where Paul's imprisonment at Jerusalem is foretold, Acts 11:28, the famine that Agabus foretold, etc.) it does not furnish adequate proof against those who insist that prophecy of all kinds have ceased with the closing of the canon of Scripture. How can an approved example be given of a time that is subsequent to the closing of the canon? Seeking an example for a period subsequent to the closing of the canon from the canon of Scripture itself demands an inherent impossibility and therefore cannot reasonably be attempted.

Accordingly, we believe the question would be better stated as follows: Where does the word of God forbid extraordinary prophesying of particular events since the closing of the canon? What law of God is being broken?

We answer simply that we can find nothing in God's word forbidding what our reformers did. They have not, to our knowledge, broken any commandment, nor required anything unlawful of others in doctrine or practice, rather they have conscientiously steered clear of abusing this mercy of God while upholding the doctrine and the practice of our church standards with integrity. Likewise, since it is evident that many men (approved of God and sound in doctrine and practice) extraordinarily foretold of particular events which did later come to pass, we believe it wisest to acknowledge the extraordinary mercy of God poured out upon them while guarding ourselves from the Antinomian excess and abuse frequently attached to such occurrences.

We are not required to believe in a particular extraordinary revelation simply because it "appears" to be plausible or somebody makes such a claim. The revealed Word of God is our alone infallible rule of faith and practice and all things must be tried and proved according to its dictates. As stated by the Durham above:

Every persuasion of mind before the event comes, and answerableness in it when it comes, will not be sufficient to make it pass for a prophetic foreknowledge, more than when in dreams it

may often so fall out (James Durham, *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation*, Glasgow, 1788 edition, cited from SWRB bound photocopy, Vol. 2, p. 221).

However, if others do act upon the basis of an extraordinary prophetic utterance, after examining Scripture to insure that no unlawful acts are required therein, one may not accuse them of sin unless it can be proved that a particular law of God was violated in the proposition or execution of the act. Again, Durham explains:

There is **difference** to be put betwixt the **simple foretelling of an event**, which may be of God, and **a conclusion which may be drawn therefrom**; this may be of ourselves, as we may see in the predictions of these, Acts 21 [vs. 11-PRCE], who foretold of Paul's imprisonment at Jerusalem, yet was not that to divert him from his going there, as many collected; that therefore was not from God, as Paul's pressure in the spirit to go notwithstanding, does clear; **every such prediction therefore cannot be made a rule of duty**, seeing the Lord may have other good ends of trial, advertisement and confirmation in it. **And we will not find, that any have made use of such particular revelations, as from them to press a duty upon others, that would not otherwise be warrantable, although, when it concurs with other grounds, it may have its weight for swaying in lawful things** (James Durham, *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation*, Glasgow, 1788 edition, cited from SWRB bound photocopy, Vol. 2, p. 222).

Finally, we see no Scriptural argument for, or wisdom in, forbidding what God has not forbidden, providing all these wise and prudent rules are carefully observed. Having, in our judgment, no valid reason to disbelieve the accounts of our godly forefathers, we choose rather to glorify God for his merciful condescension while protecting ourselves from ungodly extremes on both sides of the question.

Answer to question #3 - Is the cessationist position basically correct with extraordinary exceptions, or is the cessationist position a theological error that should be repudiated?

The cessationist position is basically correct and the position we now hold is not essentially different from that of the past though it has become more distinct and qualified.

As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:1) states:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; **those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.**

The knowledge of God, and of his will, which are necessary to salvation are wholly committed to writing in the Holy Scripture. The former ways of God's revealing these **truths** unto his people by immediate inspiration is therefore wholly ceased. Thus, we conclude that a certain substantial category of revelation has entirely ceased. No statement of truth, no moral law, no article of faith, fundamentally or non-fundamentally necessary to salvation, can ordinarily or extraordinarily be added to Scripture or bind the conscience by means of prophetic utterance subsequent to the closing of the canon.

As stated above we are in full agreement with James Durham when he states:

Assert. 3. Prophecy, taken for an immediate revealing of gospel truth and mysteries, such

as that, 1 Cor. 14, and what was frequent in the apostolic times, is now ceased; and there is neither such a gift, nor such an office:

(1.) There is not such a gift; for it is not common to all that are renewed; it was not so in the apostles' days; there were diversities of gifts; and **this gift is distinguished from saving grace**, 1 Cor. 12, and 14, etc., neither is that particular gift of prophesy continued; for, there is no other gift continued, as these of healing, tongues, and interpretations, whereby men may come in an immediate way to the exercise of these. And,

(2.) **Experience shows**, that that has ceased, and God calls men to the use of ordinary means for the attaining of the knowledge of his will; and there being now no such gift that will abide trial, there is therefore no such office to be pleaded for, that follows upon that; yet even **these prophets, in the matter prophesied by them, were to be tried by the word and judged**; and, in the gift, if it were a revelation indeed, 1 Cor. 14. Now, there being none such who can abide that proof, we are not, at least, without that, to acknowledge such a gift, or such an office (James Durham, *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation*, Glasgow, 1788 edition, cited from SWRB bound photocopy, Vol. 2., pp. 219-224).

However, we maintain that extraordinary revelation of particular future events and notable judgements upon the wicked, are not of the same category as the immediate revealing of gospel truth and mysteries necessary to salvation, and that such extraordinary revelations may be and have been made known to the children of God since the closing of the canon.

Answer to question #4 - Is it permissible for church officers to receive extra-biblical revelation that will guide them in the direction of church affairs?

It is not permissible for church officers or any others to guide church affairs by extraordinary revelation since (as demonstrated above) we do not judge extraordinary prophecy to be equal with Scripture. We will only permit the Church of Christ to be guided according to the mind of the Spirit as revealed in God's holy Word. This position is consistent with the WCF 1:10 which states that, "the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." Since extraordinary prophecy does not fall into a category equal with Scripture we cannot authoritatively judge controversies by it, nor can we expect or require others to obey its direction.

Answer to Question # 5 - Is it permissible for members of our congregations to claim to receive extra-biblical communications from God about future events and to claim to be prophets?

It is permissible for a member of our congregation to "claim" to receive extraordinary revelations from God provided that the rules stated above are complied with. Anyone in our membership who claimed to receive such a revelation would be questioned and instructed by the session regarding the Biblical parameters to follow. For our session to say that it is not permissible or possible for anyone to receive such a revelation, would be to condemn our worthy reformers and to put unnecessary limits upon what God may do now or in the future. As already stated, for us to unconditionally condemn this practice we would need Scriptural proof demonstrating how such a practice violates Gods law in all circumstances. We, of course, are open to listening to any specific lawful charge, provided the appropriate steps were taken to first deal with an offending brother in private. Anyone claiming to hold the office of a Prophet would be speaking and acting contrary to our covenanted standards and would be dealt with accordingly.

Answer to Question #6 - How would someone know that he has received extra-biblical communication from God rather than having simply deceived himself?

Generally, our stated rules ought to be applied to anyone who claims to have an extraordinary prophecy. If all the Scriptural rules are carefully applied beforehand, we then would attempt to determine whether or not a person had been deceived subsequent to the predicted event. Even if a particular prediction came true we would not necessarily assume that such a revelation was extraordinarily from the Spirit of God. Furthermore, even if such a prediction came true it would be no sin to remain in doubt as to source of the prediction, since we are not tied to believe these predictions as immediately inspired. However, we must also prayerfully consider that such things are possible and if God extraordinarily edifies and protects His children by means of such a revelation we must remain open to recognizing His mercy and giving thanks for it. We must be careful to avoid extreme rationalism and skepticism as much as extreme antinomianism.

Answer to Question #7 - How would I know that someone claiming to get extra-biblical revelations from God is actually getting such revelations from God.

Same answer as #6

Answer to Question #8 - What is the difference between mysticism and genuine spiritual experience?

This is difficult to answer due to the the vague nature of the question. If you could be more specific, we will be happy to attempt a more complete answer. Generally, mysticism is grounded solely upon mere impressions and emotions while true spiritual experience is ultimately grounded upon the revealed Word of God.

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