

credentials as Prophet and translator, after he had personally manifested his power to reveal the fulness of saving truth directly from heaven, and after he claimed receipt of authority to perform all saving ordinances in the new church. At that moment when he had powerfully demonstrated to his followers the irrelevance of priestly training, clerical degrees, and scholarly credentials, he changed *modus operandi* in midstream... It is to this two-pronged approach that we may trace the Mormon paradox of a culture of spiritual certainty—a group embrace of a rhetoric of absolute self-assurance about spiritual truths—coexisting with a conception of education as the endless and eternal acquisition of the knowledge that leads to godhood.¹⁶⁴⁹

- E-37** In this vein, the distinguished religious scholar Martin E. Marty concludes that Mormons, if one admits that they “do” theology at all, work from a “slightly broader definition of that term than the conventional ones. “Conventional” here means the Christian modes that combine the language of the Hebrew Scriptures with mainly Greek philosophical concepts as filtered through academic experiences in Western Europe.”¹⁶⁵⁰ “In general,” however, “LDS scholars are... at home with... Christian thought... They earn their doctorates at Harvard or other graduate schools permeated with the concepts of Christian theology, even if and though they often return ‘home’ to Brigham Young & Company.”¹⁶⁵¹

Faulconer notes the fact that, in the formal sense, “Mormonism does not even have a widely accepted theology, much less an official one, though it has and has had several practitioners.” He observes that one “obvious reason for the relative absence of theology among Mormons is that the Church is still young.” More important reasons, however, for the “dearth of theology among Latter-day Saints” include: “the belief in continuing revelation, the nature of scripture, and the fact that, like many Jews, Mormons understand their religion primarily in terms of practices and attitudes rather than in terms of beliefs.”¹⁶⁵² However:

... there is an important sense in which, without calling it theology, Latter-day Saints have practiced hermeneutical theology since shortly after the founding of the Church. They have been intensely interested in and written much about Church history, understanding Mormon history—the things we have done and experienced—as the key to understanding what it means to be a Mormon; understanding the interpretation of Latter-day Saint history as disciplined reflection on what it means to be a Latter-day Saint, or in other words as quasi-theological, even if only implicitly.”¹⁶⁵³

- E-38** On this point, Wright comments:

I remember a well-known Preacher saying that he thought a lot of Christians used the Bible as an unsorted edition of *Daily Light*. It really ought to be arranged into neat little devotional chunks, but it happens to have got all muddled up... But to treat the Bible like that is, in fact, simply to take your place in a very long tradition of Christians who have tried to make the Bible into a set of abstract truths and rules—abstract devotional doctrinal, or evangelistic snippets here and there...

The problem with all such solutions as to how to use the Bible is that they belittle the Bible and exalt something else. Basically they imply—and this is what I mean when I say that they offer too low a view of scripture—that God has, after all, given us the wrong sort of book and it is our job to turn it into the right sort of book by engaging in these hermeneutical moves, translation procedures or whatever. They imply that the real place where God has revealed himself—the real locus of authority and revelation—is, in fact, somewhere else; somewhere else in the past in an event that once took place, or somewhere else in a timeless sphere which is not really hooked into our world at all [that] touches it tangentially, or somewhere in the present in “my own experience,” or somewhere in the future in some great act which is yet to come... My conclusion, then, is this: that the regular views of scripture and its authority... fail to do justice to what the Bible actually is—a book, an ancient book, an ancient narrative book. They function by turning that book into something else, and by implying thereby that God has, after all, given us the wrong sort of book.¹⁶⁵⁴

- E-39** On the strengths of regular rotation class study of the sacred works, and the problems in relying on selective lectionaries rather than readings of the whole book of scripture, Wright observes:

1649 T. L. Givens, *Paradox*, p. 74.

1650 M. E. Marty, *Foreword*, p. vii.

1651 *Ibid.*, p. ix. See D. L. Paulsen, *Interview*, pp. 67–68 for a discussion of the place of theology in LDS scholarship.

1652 J. E. Faulconer, *Tracy*, pp. 472, 473–474. See also J. E. Faulconer, *Coffee*; B. Huff, *Theology*; J. Siebach, *Response*.

1653 J. E. Faulconer, *Tracy*, p. 476; cf. J. Shippis, *Sojourner*, 381–383, 385, 390 n. 40.

1654 N. T. Wright, *Authoritative*.