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Smith, Joseph

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Smith, Joseph (1805–44). An influential 19th-c. US religious figure, Joseph Smith was a 14-year-old boy living in New York when, by his own account, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him, urging him not to join any organized religion. Three years later, he reported, the angel Moroni came to him and identified himself as a resurrected prophet and guardian of an ancient sacred record that was buried nearby. In 1827 Smith retrieved this record, which he said was inscribed on gold plates, and began to translate it “through the gift and power of God,” making use of a “seer-stone” and an instrument called “interpreters.” In March 1830, Smith published the resulting *Book of Mormon**. Days later, Smith organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A dynamic and charismatic leader with a prodigious talent for scriptural production, Smith was a locus of angelic visitations and heavenly revelations, claiming to restore ancient texts, doctrines, rituals, priesthood keys, and sealing powers.

He relocated converts to Kirtland, Ohio, and to areas in Missouri, and then founded the town of Nauvoo, Illinois. His teachings were centered on a fully restored church, modern-day prophets and apostles, premortal existence, eternal families, and the human potential for godhood.

Rumors of his practice of polygamy enraged opponents suspicious of his local and national political activity and a mob murdered him in 1844 in Carthage, Illinois. **See also LATTER-DAY SAINTS; MORMON, BOOK OF; MORMON WORSHIP; YOUNG, BRIGHAM.** TERRYL GIVENS