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Elements in New Religious Movements

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MORMONISM

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Mormonism

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Abstract: This Element will focus on the various denominations in the Mormon tradition, collectively sometimes referred to as “Mormonism.” They include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as the several sects of Mormon fundamentalism and multiple other denominations. Often described as the quintessential new religious movement, Mormonism is useful for studying the dynamics of new religious formation, evolution, schism, and adaptation to American culture more broadly. It emerged in the heat of the Second Great Awakening, the flourishing of religious creativity and innovation that followed American disestablishment, inspired by the visionary ideas of Joseph Smith Jr., a New York farmer who adopted a particular style of restorationism, a form of Christianity popular in the period. Since that time, the various branches of Mormonism have embraced different relationships with the broader stream of American culture. Some have sought integration with America’s Protestant majority; others have emphasized sectarian distinctiveness.

Keywords: Mormonism, Joseph Smith, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Fundamentalism, Modernism

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