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*A Contemporary Religious Political Movement: LDS Church's
Nation-Wide Political Campaigns*

ABSTRACT

Drawing empirically on the examples of the Church of Latter-Day Saints' (Mormon) participation in anti-ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) ratification campaign and its latest attempts to influence other political issues of moral consequences (such as same-sex marriage) in the United States, the paper attempts to analyse the dynamics of a contemporary religiously motivated political movement.

Despite being, on any of these issues, a part of a wider coalition of political actors, the Mormon church displayed a specifically religious motivation, justification and *modus operandi*. Owing to strong religious legitimacy of their power – based on the doctrine of continuous revelation and enhanced by a sort of “personality cult” of the Church President-Prophet developing in late 20th century – the leadership of the church has been capable of effective grassroots mobilization, achieved through a disciplined universal priesthood structure.

While, from the theoretical point of view, this Mormon political movement is of a traditional, “old” variation (ideological and social cohesion of members, well-defined, stable membership, hierarchical leadership, etc.) it has nevertheless been relatively successful in modern political environment. The Mormon engagement, at least in the anti-ERA campaign, had made a difference certainly in Utah, and probably elsewhere as well.

Key words: Mormonism, political movements, religion and politics, Equal Rights Amendment, same-sex marriage

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Joseph Smith's bid for presidency in 1844, Mormonism has been engaged in American national politics to some extent. Throughout the 19th century, this engagement centred around gaining statehood for Mormon-governed Utah while

defending the practice of polygamy and the religious-political idea of a theocratic Kingdom of God [Hansen 1967: chapter VII and ff]. When this effort failed and Utah was admitted to the Union as a state in 1896, only after the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) gave up polygamy and its political monopoly, Mormonism has moved, in the 20th century, into the mainstream of American political life, usually remaining on its conservative side. In the second half of the 20th century political activity of the LDS Church focused on specific issues deemed to be of importance (usually, though not exclusively, for moral reasons) for Mormons, rather than on constant support for any of the two major political parties. The Church's political actions on two such issues – the ratification of Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and the legality of same-sex marriage – will be analysed in the article as examples of its activity as a political movement.

Mormonism itself can be interpreted as a religious movement of which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah) is the largest, though not the only, organization. To qualify as a political movement, it has to be an *intentional mass effort towards transformation of some aspect of social reality by political means*. As we shall see, the Mormon campaigns (the anti-ERA campaign will be our special focus) fit this definition sufficiently: they were (the anti-gay marriage campaign still is) well-planned and coordinated actions, involving numerous church members, intending to stop potentially threatening legal and ultimately social developments, using a whole repertoire of political tools. Unlike modern social movements (i.e. alterglobalism), characterized by informal, horizontal networks of members, who share some collective identity [della Porta, Diani 2006: 20–21] but may not form a distinct and integrated social group, Mormon political activity represents the “old”, traditional type of political movements: based on a distinct, cohesive social group, acting through a formal organization, headed by hierarchical leadership. To describe the LDS Church, in the context of these campaigns, as a political movement, is not to imply that politics is the defining feature or *raison d'être* of the Church. On the contrary, for most of its leaders and members alike, it is primarily a religious organization, offering supernatural rewards to its members. Such designation is, rather, an analytical device to highlight a particular (political, in this case) aspect of the organization's activity.

The purpose of the article is, first, to present the Mormon anti-ERA campaign against the background of conservative religious groups' political activity, looking at strategies and methods used by the Church, and then, second, try to explain the LDS' extraordinary mobilization capacity and political efficiency. I contend that what made a difference in comparison with other, not only secular but also religious participants of the ERA battle, was exceptionally strong legitimacy of the church leadership power grounded in the doctrine of continuous revelation which elevates the President of the Church to the position of the living Prophet. The article concludes with observations on recent Mormon political activity related to the issue of same-sex marriage, suggesting striking similarities with, but also some differences from, the anti-ERA campaign.

PUTTING THE ANTI-ERA CAMPAIGN IN THE CONTEXT

Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution which read, in its 1972 version: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex” (section 1). Its declared purpose was to extend equality of rights for women beyond voting rights guaranteed to them in the Nineteenth Amendment. ERA failed when introduced in Congress for the first time in 1923 and on a few subsequent occasions, but passed both houses in 1972. To become law, it needed the ratification of at least three fourths or 38 states. Initially, the ratification process proceeded smoothly, reaching 35 states in 1977. But no other state approved the amendment before the deadline of 1979, later extended by Congress to 1982, and five states rescinded their previous ratification [Mansbridge 1986: 12–13]¹. The ultimate failure of ERA, despite the support of the majority of American population, is largely attributable to an intense campaign weighed by a variety of conservative political and religious organizations that managed to counter the pro-ratification campaign of feminist and other left-wing or liberal organizations.

It is important to recognize that, when fighting ERA, the Mormon church was a part of a large coalition of conservative forces, both secular and religious. The seventies of the 20th century saw the emergence of a broad political movement of Protestant fundamentalist and evangelical churches known as Religious Right². The hitherto politically inactive members of these churches have, for a variety of reasons, engaged themselves into politics through organizations such as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, James Dobson’s Focus on the Family or, later, Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition [Potz 2008: 159–183]. Whether Mormonism has been a part of Religious Right is disputable (if only because Mormons are not Protestants and many Protestants and Catholics even refuse to recognize them as Christians), but formal identification is of little consequence here. The crux of the matter is that the LDS Church has acted in concert with Religious Right organizations – notably Beverly LaHaye’s Concerned Women of America or the Catholic Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum [Wilcox 1996: 65–66] – on a limited number of issues important to each of these groups, including ERA and same-sex marriage. Such interfaith alliances based on moral common ground while temporarily, at least, disregarding theological differences, have been characteristic for, and certainly one of the reasons of political effectiveness of, religiously motivated conservative politics since roughly the seventies. They are also illustrative of a general trend in American religion to align along ideological, not only denominational lines [Williams 2002: 343–345].

¹ Whether the rescissions had any legal effect is controversial (Mansbridge thinks not), but in any case they certainly, as she correctly observes, had a political effect on the state which had yet to ratify.

² For general works on Religious Right see C. Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers. The Religious Right in American Politics*, Boulder: Westview Press 1996; W. Martin, *With God on Our Side. The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, New York: Broadway Books 1996.

The conservative-liberal divide cuts across religious traditions, leaving Southern Baptists and Missouri Synod Lutherans, for example, on the opposite sides of the cultural battlefield from their liberal coreligionists from American Baptist Churches USA and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, respectively. Mormonism is not itself utterly free from such divisions (there is, for example, a considerable number of liberally-leaning Mormons), but, compared to other denominations, it has been able to maintain extraordinary unity when acting on a few crucial matters. I will try to explain this phenomenon in a later section, and now let us turn to a description of the Church's involvement in the anti-ERA campaign.

ERA: THE STRATEGY OF ACTION

For more than two years after the ERA enactment in Congress, the LDS Church remained virtually silent on the matter, despite over thirty ratifications that occurred during this period. It only launched its campaign in early 1975. This is largely explainable by a change in the post of Church President, its highest leader: conservative but non-committal and unwilling to engage politically Harold Lee died in December 1973 and was succeeded by more vigorous and very popular among the rank-and-file Spencer Kimball [Quinn 1997: 376]. In January 1975, the "Church News" section of "Deseret News", LDS official newspaper, published an editorial expressing the Church stand against ERA [*Equal Rights Amendment* 1975: 16]. This well-timed move was sufficient to defeat ratification of the amendment in Utah legislature in February, all Mormon members voting against. The impact of the Apostle's statement is obvious: Mormon legislators who earlier supported the ERA now switched their votes, explicitly invoking the Church position as justification³. Once this position was announced, the phase of direct political action, in and outside of Utah, followed.

Organizationally, the anti-ERA campaign was coordinated by Special Affairs Committee including high LDS officials, rather than any of the governing bodies of the church (First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Quorum of the Seventies of Presiding Bishopric). This was probably to conceal the Church's direct involvement. For the same reason, in several states the Church acted through organizations ostensibly not related to it (and bearing no mention of Mormons in their names), but actually established or led by its functionaries. They were not financed directly from LDS Church coffers, but through donations of individual members, strongly recommended by the leaders. These organizations often used church premises and, most importantly, Mormon human resources.

³ Up to this point Mormon legislators voted according to their conscience, both locally and nationally. Some of them supported ERA in the U.S. Congress, without adverse reaction from the Church. *Ibid.*, p. 375, 377.

Modus operandi of those church-related organizations was typical for grass-roots lobbying, as opposed to traditional, direct lobbying. Thousands of Mormon men, but mostly women (an important public relations aspect to show that women themselves, and not their husbands, naturally interested in keeping them in submission, rejected the amendment) in states where ratification was pending – such as Nevada, Florida or Virginia – were asked to write letters to state legislators; participate in demonstrations and rallies; sign anti-ERA petitions; donate and raise funds; distribute literature to and personally contact their non-Mormon neighbours, especially in cases where, like in Nevada, the decision on ratification was to be made in a referendum; vote in a referendum or critical elections whose results might determine the fate of ERA in state legislatures.

A particularly telling example of the LDS Church's mobilization abilities was Mormon participation in International Women Year's state conferences. The purpose of these events, organized under the auspices of United Nations and the U.S. President, was, first, to elect state delegates to the national conference in Houston in November 1977 and, second, to discuss and vote on a number of issues related to women, from social security and medical care to rape laws and pornography to lesbian rights [Martin 1996: 164–165]⁴. Primarily, however, the conferences were perceived as expressing women's attitude to Equal Rights Amendment [Young 2007: 632]. The LDS leaders, initially intending to boycott these seemingly feminist events, decided instead to take them over. In Utah, Mormon women, on the call of their priests, packed the Salt Lake City conference centre and, outnumbering non-Mormons approximately thirteen thousand to one thousand, voted down all resolutions, related to the ERA or not, and elected almost exclusively Mormon delegation to the national conference [Young 2007: 635]. Similar efforts in other states proved somewhat less effective, if only for demographical reasons, but Mormon participants could often influence the outcomes due to excellent coordination (e.g. moving *en masse* from committee to committee whenever a crucial vote was to be held).

It is important to note that most of the above described political actions were more or less directly organized by the LDS Church and through its structures. Members were “asked”, “called” or even “set apart” for the anti-ERA activities [Kendall White 1989: 256], the last phrase in Mormon parlance being roughly equivalent to ordaining to a priestly office, which obviously added religious legitimacy to the function. Bishops were asked by an Apostle coordinating from LDS headquarters to send at least ten women from each ward [Quinn 2000: 379] (the basic ecclesiastical territorial unit in the Church) to the Utah IWY conference. Instructions and calls for action regarding ERA were read during church meetings and church telephone-trees were used to mobilize members. Even Mormon missionaries might occasionally be

⁴ Martin argues that the inclusion and passage of the three “hot-button issues”: abortion, ERA and lesbian rights during the Houston conference spurred the strongest opposition from conservative organizations.

employed in anti-ERA activities [Quinn 2000: 386]. Clearly, “The Mormon campaign throughout the nation depended upon the ecclesiastical structure of Mormonism – the social networks, the Relief Society [Mormon women organization – M.P.], the coordination and tacit support of top officials, the local facilities and the local and general church media. It could not have occurred without the support of the Mormon hierarchy” [Kendall White 1989: 257].

EXPLAINING MORMON POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Having established an intense commitment in anti-ERA political activity on part of both the Latter-Day Saints Church as an institution and many of its members, let us now inquire into the reasons 1) why would Mormons so vehemently oppose Equal Rights Amendment in the first place and 2) why they were so effective in mobilizing against it.

As concerns the first question, many arguments have been advanced against the Amendment. The LDS Church has not opposed basic civil rights for women; in fact, Mormon-governed Utah was, in 1870, the first United States territory or state to allow women to vote⁵. However, the ERA was feared to accomplish much more than this basic legal equality. From the legal standpoint, it could actually nullify some privileges obtained by women in areas such as child care or social security. Even more troubling for Mormons were its potential social consequences: in refusing to acknowledge natural differences between men and women, it could lead to gender-blind society, succinctly summarized under the slogans of unisex toilets and women on the battlefronts [Kintz 1998: 132]. Still worse, by “stifling many God-given feminine instincts”, an official First Presidency statement warned, “It would strike at the family, humankind’s basic institution” [*First Presidency Issues Statement Opposing Equal Rights Amendment* 1976]. The ERA threatened to question traditional male and female roles within family, with men failing to provide and women failing to care for their families.

While these dire consequences may look a far-fetched misinterpretation of an innocuous proposition of legal equality of sexes, the range of possible interpretations of such a general clause in American constitutional law is almost infinite. In American political system, it must be remembered, the courts, with federal Supreme Court as the ultimate instance, exercise judicial review, i.e. the right to control the constitutionality of laws. In the process, they are entitled to determine the content

⁵ Technically, franchise for women was introduced first in the territory of Wyoming two months earlier, but Utah held first elections in which women could vote [Bigler 1998: 283]. While this was, admittedly, a strategic move by Brigham Young to counter some of the bad publicity the Church was receiving in the midst of the anti-polygamy campaign, Mormons have never since had any second thoughts about it. The crux of the issue was *how* Mormon women vote, not *if* they should vote at all. Indeed, they almost always voted along with their male coreligionists and, generally, according to the Church positions.

and meaning of constitutional rules as applied to legal conflicts under scrutiny. This involves them in actual law-making, especially when the interpretation assigned to a constitutional norm is very removed from the literal content of the Constitution. It is due in part to the very laconic, general and archaic character of the Constitution (many present-day problems were, naturally, not envisaged in the 18th century) and in part to the activist legal philosophy of some judges, who understand their mission as creative application of these over two-centuries old “majestic generalities and ennobling pronouncements”, as former United States Supreme Court justice William Brennan once called them [Brennan Jr. 1993: 55]. In any case, the defenders of “traditional family” were not totally unjustified in fearing unpredictable applications of the Equal Rights Amendment, especially in the wake of a recent 1973 *Roe v. Wade* [410 U.S. 113] decision, in which, from the conservative perspective, the Supreme Court inferred the right to abortion (non-existent in the Constitution) from the right to privacy (also non-existent in the Constitution)⁶. What could be interpreted from the new amendment, only time would tell.

Crucially, even though all of these arguments against ERA were advanced by other members of the conservative anti-ERA coalition, as well, Mormons had special reasons to fear disintegration of a traditional model of family and the feminine and masculine role definitions within it. These reasons were not merely traditional but theological and, even more importantly, eschatological. According to Mormon beliefs, an individual's fate in the afterlife is directly related to his or her marital status. Mormon heaven is divided into three hierarchically arranged spheres, the celestial (highest), terrestrial and telestial (lowest) kingdoms. While even all but the worst sinners can get to the telestial sphere, the highest degree of glory is reserved, in principle, only for the righteous Mormon couples [Riess, Kimball Bigelow 2005: 35–37]. Singles are at a distinct disadvantage, as the deceased join or are joined in heaven by their family members and continue eternally with their earthly spouses, having been sealed to each other for eternity in a temple ceremony. Faithful Mormons who are married with many children are more likely to progress to a godly status and inherit their own heavenly kingdoms. Therefore, “Told that the ERA would eradicate the basic distinctions between the sexes and loosen men and women from the gender-based obligations of marriage, Mormon men and women opposed ERA because it contradicted their most fundamental beliefs about the nature of both life and the afterlife” [Young 2007: 631]. This is certainly the sort of a motivation that the secular antagonists of the ERA and most religious ones, too, are lacking. It also provides a contemporary vindication for Max Weber's insistence on the relation between a religion's vision of salvation and social behavior of its members [Weber 1978: chapter 6, section vii and ff].

⁶ Further impact of the *Roe v. Wade* decision lied in the perception of state legislators, who were about to decide on the ERA ratification, that adding an amendment to the Constitution takes significant amount of political power away from them and into the hands of Supreme Court justices, who may then use it the way they did in *Roe* [Mansbridge 1986: 13].

This brings us to the other question posed at the beginning of this section. While this doctrinal rationale helps explain the sincerity and intensity with which many devout Mormons felt about the issue, such feelings need not necessarily translate into effective political mobilization. Moreover, not all Mormons perceived the content of the Equal Rights Amendment as a threat to those important family values. As a matter of fact, over 50% of them approved (while 38% disapproved) of the statement: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex” when it was read to them without the mention that it is actually the proposed ERA⁷. There was even some internal dissent within the Church (pro-ERA Mormon women established MERA – Mormons for ERA and its leader Sonia Johnson, an excommunicated Mormon feminist, gained some publicity), although its significance was marginal, both for the Church and the campaign⁸. The bulk of the believers, initially, had not have any definite position on or even knowledge of the issue. They followed the Church’s lead despite having been unaware of the Equal Rights Amendment at all prior to the start of the LDS engagement [Young 2007: 624] or, when informed, still failed to grasp the potentially detrimental consequences of the amendment. So why did they respond to their Church’s call for action in such a disciplined way?

Trivial as it may seem, the simplest answer would be: because they were Mormons. As Campbell and Monson demonstrated, there exists a statistically significant correlation between religious participation and political engagement. The more someone is involved in the life of their church (as measured by church attendance, participation in non-worship church activity, charity giving, etc.), the more this person is likely to be politically involved, too. While this is true for some other religious denominations, as well, the correlation is strongest in the case of Mormons [Campbell, Monson 2007: 119–120]. One likely rationale for this is that churches with strict standards of behavior, demanding a lot of commitment from their members – and LDS Church clearly qualifies, with its dietary prohibitions, plenty of time spent in church-related activities, ten percent tithing and a degree of cultural distinctiveness which may result in relative social isolation, especially outside of Utah – are naturally well-poised to overcome the free-riders problem, a classic dilemma of any collective action. The insiders are inclined to accept the Church’s call for action, just one more among their many commitments. Additionally, everyday involvement within the church helps members develop certain civic skills such as organizing and attending meetings, making presentations, writing letters, taking responsibility for various tasks, however small, etc. These skills, along with social capital built through

⁷ The survey was conducted among Utah Mormons in 1980. When asked about the passage of the ERA, three-quarters were against [Kendall White 1989: 261].

⁸ It tends to be overestimated by the critics of LDS Church engagement, such as Kendall White [1989: 258–260]. Suffice it to say that MERA had a little over a thousand members nationally at the peak of its popularity, while the church hierarchy managed to mobilize some thirteen thousand Mormon women for a single event (IWY conference in Utah) and many more nationwide [Young 2007: 635].

intense contacts within the church environment, are instrumental in effective political activity [Campbell, Monson 2007: 115–116].

These structural conditions, characteristic of a culturally distinct, tightly-knit religious group, provide important background for the LDS success as a political movement. The most compelling single explanation, however, of the rank-and-file obedience to the Church's directives, including those with political context, lies in the strong legitimacy of the Mormon leaders' power. The sheer religious character of this legitimacy – the fact that it is grounded in supernatural justifications – puts religious rulers at a certain advantage over secular ones: unlike the latter, the former are brokers of supernatural rewards, often of ultimate value to a true believers, such as blessings, significant rituals, etc., but most of all – eternal salvation.

While this may account for the edge the Mormons have in comparison with secular organizations whose members neither fight for religious ends nor are answerable to administrators or providers of religious rewards, it does not in itself explain their greater capacity for concerted action than other religious groups have. This concerns not only liberal churches from the other side of the cultural divide, but also their allies from the conservative camp, such as Southern Baptists or Roman Catholics. Here the difference lies, I argue, in the special position of Mormon church leaders grounded in the doctrine of *continuous revelation*. Nearly all major Christian denominations, including Catholics and most Protestants, consider revelation a finished process which began with God's theophany in the Garden of Eden and ended with Christ's sacrificial death. The church, in the course of its history, can only strive to better understand and refine this revelation, but cannot receive any new one. By contrast, Mormons, along with some other heterodox Christian groups, believe that God constantly guides His people through history. This is done by revealing His will to the church leaders – to a group containing, at least, the First Presidency and the Apostles, with the President's prophetic role being the most prominent. Accordingly, the President and the Apostles have been accorded the title of "prophet, seer and revelator". One of the Church's scriptures, *Doctrines and Covenants*, is a series of revelations received mainly by Joseph Smith, and most significant decisions in the LDS Church history (such as introduction and renunciation of polygamy or, as recently as 1978, opening the priesthood to non-white members) ["Official Declaration 2"] were prompted or approved by divine communication [Potz 2013: 425–430].

The view of the Church Presidents as, effectively, infallible prophets⁹ acting on God's command has been perpetuated by the hierarchy. Apostle Ezra Taft Benson went as far as saying that "The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works" [Benson 1980], where "the standard works" mean the scriptures of the Church. This seemingly radical statement fits well with the logic of active God

⁹ Although the term is not accepted in Mormon theology nor used by the leaders, a *de facto* infallibility of the President and, to a lesser extent, the Apostles, is a prominent feature of late 20th and early 21st century LDS church. See W. van Beek [2011: 20–22].

leading His flock through history, constantly adding to and even revising earlier revelations (including Mormonism's holy books). As proclaimed in the groups' Articles of Faith, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" [Articles of Faith]. The truth of the revelations is not to be doubted, for, as the fourth Church President Wilford Woodruff declared, "The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray" [Woodruff 1890]. The briefest statement of this doctrine, however, was given, in the time (though not directly in the context) of the ERA campaign, by the Church's Young Women organization president Elaine Cannon: "When the Prophet speaks, sisters, the debate is over" [Cannon 1978]¹⁰. It was later endorsed by First Presidency First Counsellor (second in command after Church President) Eldon Tanner [Tanner 1979].

What is more, after being downplayed in the first half of the 20th century, this prophetic designation of Church Presidents has again been highlighted since the late 1960', amounting to what D. Michael Quinn likens to a personality cult [Quinn 1997: 363–366]. Since then the President has routinely been referred to as the Living Prophet in official Church publications. Importantly, however, the continuous revelation doctrine and the resulting position of the Church top official is willingly accepted by the majority of Mormons, too, as a fundamental of their faith, not something imposed from above. In the case of the ERA, Mormons who took anti-ERA stance despite having no interest in the matter previously, or even switched their position completely, openly admitted they did it because of the supreme knowledge or ability to predict the future by the Church leaders and especially the President [Gordon, Gillespie 2012: 348; Quinn 1997: 377]. In sum, the 19th century Mormon territorial theocratic political system has turned into the 20th and 21st century internal church theocracy with extremely strongly legitimized power of its rulers. Few other religious leaders, especially of groups of comparable size, enjoy such a legitimacy – not even hierarchs of Roman Catholic church, a structurally similar organization. Effectively, in contemporary Mormonism, "adherence to the prophet's instructions in all matters is a hallmark of Mormon religious observance, *including with regard to political questions*" [Campbell, Monson 2007: 121].

Lastly, not only is the LDS Church a hierarchical organization, but it is based on a principle of non-professional universal male priesthood. All worthy boys at the age of 12 are ordained to the lowest priestly function and then progress up the ecclesiastical ladder well into their adult years [O'Dea 1964: 175–176]. As a consequence, they perform all their assignments within the church in their capacity as priests, which adds religious significance – a sense of mission or calling – to even the down-to-earth, everyday tasks.

¹⁰ She also called President Kimball "the mouthpiece of the Lord" (access 12.08.2014).

MORMONS AND THE LEGALIZATION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The legalization of same-sex marriage is the other major political issue in which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints chose to engage. Its involvement dates back to the mid-90s, when controversies over the issue began in several states, notably Hawaii. The LDS campaign against homosexual marriage displays many similarities and even continuities with the anti-ERA campaign, in terms of the Church's justification and the members' motivation for, as well as the strategy of, political action.

Doctrinally, opposition to same-sex marriage is rooted in the same traditional, eschatologically grounded conception of family we have seen in the case of ERA. In a recent statement of January 2014 the First Presidency reminded: "Marriage between a man and a woman was instituted by God and is central to His plan for His children and for the well-being of society. Strong families, guided by a loving mother and father, serve as the fundamental institution for nurturing children, instilling faith, and transmitting to future generations the moral strengths and values that are important to civilization and *crucial to eternal salvation*" [italics added – M.P.] [*Church Instructs Leaders on Same-Sex Marriage* 2014]. While homosexual behaviour (as opposed to homosexual feelings or attitudes) is in itself regarded sinful, at the core of the LDS Church's opposition to gay marriage lay its eschatological ramifications. Indeed, the Church is motivated by "more than just a belief in the deleterious effects on society, or the sinfulness of the individual behaviour. Gay marriage is seen as the utter destruction of God's plan for humanity" [Perry, Cronin 2012: 94].

Interestingly, the Church came to grudgingly accept, if only for tactical reasons, legal recognition of various kinds of civil unions or domestic partnerships, not only homosexual, and their rights in spheres like medical care, hospitalization, fair housing [*The Divine Institution of Marriage* 2008; Moore 2008], etc., reserving its opposition to defining marriage as other than between a man and a woman. It also displays an image of not being anti-gay, but only seeking to protect the traditional model of family¹¹. In moral terms, at stake is the sanctity of the God-given and eschatologically privileged union between husband and wife¹².

In terms of methods, essentially the same patterns were followed as in the anti-ERA campaign. The Church issued a series of statements, usually as a response to or a warning against some unwelcome developments (enactment of legalizing

¹¹ However, D. M. Quinn documents a pervasive homophobia inside the LDS church [Quinn 2000: 36 and ff].

¹² There is also a first amendment free-exercise clause concern of a church's or religious functionary's right to refuse to bless a same-sex marriage, but the problem has never been real. Typically, laws legalizing same-sex marriage do not require a minister to perform it, but merely recognize it if a minister chooses to do so (see R. Crapo, *Chronology of Mormon/LDS Involvement in Same-Sex Marriage Politics*, <http://www.mormonsocialscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Crapo-R1997-Chronology-of-LDS-Involvement-In-Same-Sex-Marriage-Politics.pdf> (access 17.08.2014) for a Hawaii Circuit Court Ruling to that effect). Conversely, these statutes do not confer on same-sex couples a right to have religious marriage ceremony.

legislation, court ruling upholding it, etc.), explaining and justifying its position and urging Church members to act. For instance, First Presidency issued a letter to California Mormons to support with their time and money “Proposition 8”, a proposed amendment to the state’s constitution outlawing same-sex marriages in 2008 [Moore 2008]. In supporting a similar amendment to the federal Constitution in 2006, the leadership went to the lengths of having its letter read from all Mormon church pulpits [Perry, Cronin 2012: 97]. The members have been mobilized through Church channels, but, again familiarly, the hierarchy has usually preferred to disguise its direct involvement, acting through organizations or political action committees without the Church name of affiliation¹³. The Saints have often constituted a significant proportion of activists in such organizations, engaging in door-to-door canvassing, letter-writing, leaflet distribution, demonstrating, fundraising, etc.

There are also, however, differences between the two campaigns. In the case of ERA, the goals were fairly well-defined and localized (to stop ratification by the legislature or referendum in respective states). Same-sex marriage campaign required more nationally-oriented efforts, since the federal government is a part to the issue, as well, and it was waged on multiple fronts. For example, since not only legislative, but also judicial decisions matter, the Church has tried to act as *amicus curiae* or otherwise involve itself in court proceedings. Also, it naturally makes extensive use of the Internet, both for publicity and fundraising [Gordon, Gillespie 2012: 359–360].

In June 2015 the divided (5–4) United State Supreme Court issued a landmark decision which declared a right to marry for same-sex couples a constitutional right, thereby making all state legislation banning such marriages unconstitutional [*Obergefell v. Hodges* (576 US. 14–556), 2015]. From now on, same-sex marriage must be allowed and recognized in the whole territory of the United States. In response, the First Presidency issued a statement, to be read to all the members, affirming the position of the LDS Church on the issue: as a matter of doctrine, all sexual relations outside of a valid marriage between a man and a woman are sinful; as a matter of policy, some benefits can be granted to same-sex unions but without elevating them to the status of marriages. At the same time, the Church asserts its right to refuse to solemnize such unions and publicly express their opinions on the subject [Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve 2015]. Politically, the Supreme Court decision very likely closes the political campaign of the Church, unless it chooses to work actively for the reversal of the ruling in some future favourable circumstances. This, however, seems a remote possibility at the moment.

¹³ In one case, the same organization – Hawaiian Hana Pono – was used in both campaigns (Crapo, *Chronology*). As an aside, this practice has been criticized, in both campaigns, as of dubious legality, but to lose its tax-exempt status a religious organization would have to endorse a specific candidate or party, and not just support or oppose a political issue. The LDS Church has consistently avoided such an endorsement.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' involvement in the issues of Equal Rights Amendment ratification and the legality of same-sex marriage reveals that, in both campaigns, the Church has, functionally, acted as a political movement. It consisted of a large group of highly mobilized members under an efficient leadership, determined to achieve certain goals. The mass character of the phenomenon and the genuine motivation of its participants justifies its categorization as a political movement, rather than pressure or interest group.

The strategies used by the Church were, to a significant extent, typical for American political processes, especially in the context of religiously-motivated conservative politics of the last decades of the 20th century. They were based on grass-roots lobbying (letter- and petition-writing, demonstrating, rallying, etc.) aimed at states legislators and the electorate at large (especially when referendums were held). At times the Church was able to use its human resources even more creatively, as in the case of mass participation in International Women Year conferences. An important part of the strategy were tactical alliances with other conservative groups, mainly Protestant churches belonging to the Religious Right and the Roman Catholic church.

Although it is impossible to precisely determine the extent to which Mormons influenced the outcomes of the political campaigns they were engaged into, or, specifically, whether they "tipped the scale" in favour of the ERA rejection, it is safe to conclude that their influence was disproportionately large compared to their share of population. Consider, for instance, that, in states where Mormons constitute less than 1% of population, some 85% of letters flooding legislators' offices were written by them [Quinn 2000: 13]; the turnout among the Nevada Mormons for the ERA ratification referendum reached 95% [Young 2007: 637], similarly to other referendums on the issue, while national average was only 53.2% [Quinn 1997: 385–386]; and in California, some organizations fighting legalization of same-sex marriage were staffed predominantly by Mormon volunteers [Gordon, Gillespie 2012: 356]. Moreover, the final political or legal outcome should not be regarded the sole criterion. In the case of same-sex marriage, although the cause of preventing its legalization was ultimately lost, the campaign consisted of a series of battles (referenda, court cases), which, whether or not successful, clearly demonstrated the mobilization potential and political efficiency of the Mormon Church.

We have put forward several explanations of such LDS Church's political effectiveness. They fall into two broad categories that can be shortly described as legitimation and organization. First, from the point of view of the faithful, the Church made a persuasive case for its defence of traditional family – the bottom line of the two campaigns – that was grounded in Mormon eschatology and offered the ultimate reward for adhering to those sanctified family values and gender roles. Second, by insisting that both the ERA and same-sex marriage are *moral* rather than merely political issues, it justified its involvement and was able to extract even more com-

mitment from the rank-and-file. Third, and perhaps crucially, by perpetuating and reinforcing the status of the Church President as a “prophet, seer and revelator” acting on direct inspiration from God, the leadership could muster the allegiance of even those Mormons who failed to grasp so easily the threatening this- or otherworldly consequences of the two issues.

Organizationally, the reasons for the Church’s relative success are also three-fold. First, the hierarchical structure of the group, with well-defined chain of command, makes possible quick mobilization of a large number of activists. Second, due to universal (male) priesthood, virtually all male Mormons over the age of 12 are ordained priests of some level and thus perceive their commissions from their superiors as religious callings, not just administrative tasks. Third, as a sociological observation, the membership in LDS Church makes Mormons more committed and, at the same time, equips them with more civic skills than members of comparable organizations, both secular and religious; this, naturally, bears positively on their political effectiveness. All these explanations should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but rather as multiple factors enabling the LDS Church to engage in successful political activity.

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