

Abstract:

“The Minor Religions in International Relations: The Case of the Mormons in the 20th and 21st Centuries.”

by Ann M. Hansen

Babes-Bolyai University

I. The Place of Religion in International Relations

In whatever context it is discussed, people rarely remain passive about the subject of religion. Religion influences demographics, education, the creation and enforcement of law, business and finance, diet, dress, art, architecture, transportation – the list is endless. Yet despite the fact that 81% of the world’s population professes adherence to some kind of religious belief, and that major international actors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and the European Union consider religion a factor important enough to embody in their charters, laws, international policies and decision making, scholars in most social science disciplines have traditionally been reluctant to acknowledge religion as a legitimate actor or even a factor in national and international affairs.

1.1 International Relations and Religion

Scholars in the field of International Relations (IR) have been singularly resistant to the idea. This is perhaps because since its inception, the field of International Relations has taken an “enlightened” (i.e. secular) approach, focusing only on what can be “rationally” explained or statistically proven. This approach is reflected in the majority of theories formulated and utilized by IR scholars, theories which exclude elements of religious belief or the accompanying codes of conduct which are followed by adherents of that religion. It is also reflected in the dearth of professional literature by IR scholars addressing the issue of religion.

The very nature of religion makes defining it difficult. Most definitions currently accepted and recognized by social studies scholars are based on a Western concept of religion, thereby limiting the definitions of “religion” to monotheistic belief systems, perhaps another reason why other faith systems are ignored by Western scholars. It is important to emphasize that a religion does not have to be formally organized or have a central leader in order to be considered a religion. What is relevant is how a common belief system influences the lives and actions of its followers.

Billions of people around the world follow the precepts of specific faith-based belief systems – “religions” -- which strongly influence their private and public behavior. Religion affects how an individual perceives the world, his/her political views, and even an individual’s propensity to use violence to solve a conflict or defend a principle. Individual behavior often reflects religious teachings, as does the collective behavior of a group. This collective behavior in turn often plays a role in international events. Adherence to religious codes of conduct often supersedes obedience to societal rules or national laws.

As history has shown, attempts to impose a set of religious behavioral codes on non-adherents can lead to conflicts which can become international in nature. No populated continent has been exempt from religiously-inspired violence. Anti-Jewish violence throughout the ages has been well-documented, and is escalating. In the United States of America, a country which legally encodes the protection of religious liberty, the only law in its history which encouraged and legalized the targeting and killing of a specific group of people was directed at a religious group, the Mormons. Toft’s research shows that the percentage of “religious” civil wars has risen from 19 percent in the 1940s to over 50 percent in year 2000. Fox has found statistically that religion as an element in a major armed conflict has risen worldwide from 25 per cent in 1976 to 60 percent in 2003. Religion also affects international demographics, and the creation and enforcement of local and international law. This international element places religion as an actor within the purview of International Relations, and it should be so recognized by IR scholars and theory.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

This dissertation contends that religion is, in actuality, already a legitimate actor in international affairs and should be recognized as such by the field of International Relations. It further contends that excluding or downplaying religion as an actor exposes a fundamental weakness in the paradigms of current IR theory, precisely because this ignores a player which has been instrumental in the development and maintenance of the “state”, which is the cornerstone of IR theory.

It is incumbent, therefore, to re-evaluate the place of religion in International Relations. To further strengthen the case for the recognition of religion as an actor, the writer takes the stand that religion can significantly influence nations not only because of physical conflicts, but through its influence on the lives and practices of groups of individuals who adhere to religious tenets, no matter how great or small that number of adherents. Generally religious influences have been seen to be negative, but the writer contends that the influence can also be positive.

In order to demonstrate this theory, the author chose to examine the influence of a “minor” religion – one whose adherents do not comprise a plurality of the population in any individual country or the world at large. Thus, any influence the religion had locally or internationally could be seen to be the result of its doctrinal tenets and not because its followers formed a majority (thereby being able to affect a situation due to sheer numbers). The religion chosen to serve as a test case for this theory is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the “Mormon” (or “LDS”) Church as it is more commonly known.

II. Chapter Two: Literature and Methodology

2.1 Literature Review

A review of professional literature mirrors the resistance of the field of International Relations to the idea of religion as a legitimate and relevant actor. There is a notable lack of literature written on the subject. Of the scholars who have advocated the inclusion of religion, only two (both political scientists) studied the role of *minority* religions (as opposed to *minor*

religions). The focus of both was on the role of religion in conflict, and not the role of either a minor or a minority religion within other international contexts.

In professional literature about Mormons and the LDS Church, nearly all dealt with either doctrinal issues or LDS Church history. Nothing was found about the Mormons in the context of International Relations.

This research therefore fills a gap in the literature of both fields. It looks at the Church in a context which includes both doctrinal and historical aspects, without focusing exclusively on either. It also looks at the Church from the perspective of International Relations, showing that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints already functions as an actor in international affairs. It should be recognized as such.

2.2 Research Methodology

In order to prove that a minor religion could function as an actor, it was first necessary to define the terms “actor”, “religion”, “minor religion”, “church”, and then to examine how closely the test case – The Mormon Church -- was able to meet the criteria comprised in the definitions. Because there is no academic consensus on the definitions of any of above terms, the writer examined definitions offered by several scholars, and then amalgamated elements of their ideas to create her own definitions.

The author examines the activities and programs which the LDS (Mormon) Church has either initiated or been heavily involved with internationally during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in order to prove that a religion – even one considered “minor” in terms of numbers – can indeed have an impact at local, national and international levels.

2.3 The Choice of the “Mormons” as a Test Case

Still relatively unknown in the world, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was chosen to be the test case for this research because it meets the terms of the criteria of the definitions at several levels: population (0.2% of the world’s population), a global presence (congregations in 155 countries), a heterogeneous population (no ethnic/ cultural/

socioeconomic/ political /linguistic identification within any country), a formally organized organizational infrastructure, and set doctrinal tenets.

III. Chapter 3 : Mormon History and Doctrine

In order to explain why the Mormon Church has chosen to become so involved in international affairs, and more particularly why it is *able* to do so, the author presents a short history of the Church and its key doctrinal tenets. She contends that it the doctrinal tenets of the Church are what compel Mormons to be so actively involved in charitable projects at both micro and macro levels, and which provide the Church with the resources and infrastructure to do so efficiently at an international level. The same doctrinal tenets lead the Church to invest in training its members from an early age in the skills of leadership, planning, emergency preparedness, financial caution, and community involvement and service.

IV. Chapter 4 - International Humanitarian Work

4.1 The Mormons and Humanitarian Work

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS or Mormon Church) is prominent in the community of international aid providers. They routinely work in conjunction with various NGOs such as the United Nations and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, other faith-based organizations such as Catholic Charities and Islamic Relief, and individual governments. The intended recipients of Mormon aid are not Mormons. The Church contributes goods and cash to humanitarian efforts equaling millions of US dollars every year – made possible by the personal donations of Mormons around the world. In addition, Mormon members provide manpower and technical specialists – all of them volunteers – to see that the aid is distributed effectively.

4.2 Extent of LDS Humanitarian Work

The Church's far-reaching humanitarian work has been quantitatively disproportionate to its size and classification as a "minor" religion. LDS Humanitarian Services have provided

supplies, equipment, materials, services and training to nearly every country in the world, regardless of a country's financial status and political or religious leanings. *Since 1985 the Church has spent over one billion US dollars on humanitarian aid in 167 countries.* The amount and variety of humanitarian aid provided by the Church, together with millions of hours of volunteer manpower donated by Mormon volunteers, have affected the lives of millions of people worldwide, both short-term and long-term.¹

4.3 Ongoing LDS Humanitarian Initiatives

The Church has six major on-going humanitarian initiatives: Clean Water and Sanitation, Neonatal Resuscitation Training, Vision Care (including eyeglasses and surgery), Wheelchairs and Mobility Aids, Inoculations and Immunizations, and Food Production. Each of the initiatives is discussed in terms of its purpose and implementation. Statistics are provided to show the scale of the initiative's reach. Maps show the global extent of recipient countries and, when possible, the number of people who have benefitted directly. Tables show how each LDSC initiative works to fulfill several of the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations. Individual examples of each initiative are show-cased to show the human side, or in other words, the driving factor why the Mormon Church is undertaking these initiatives. Emphasis is also placed on the Mormon volunteers and contributors who make these initiatives possible.

V. Chapter Five: Welfare, Education, Volunteer and Emergency Services

Chapter 5 looks at how the Church's doctrinal tenets have led to the creation of one of the most efficacious welfare systems in existence in the world. It discusses how the Church's emphasis on education *for all* affects its international activities, and led to the creation of the Perpetual Education Fund, designed to enable Mormons in developing countries to receive

¹ "Values: Humanitarian Aid", in *Mormon.org*, 2013 <http://mormon.org/values/humanitarian-aid> Retrieved 10 September 2013

professional training (graduates earn on average 3-4 times more than they would have without the education).

The “Helping Hands” volunteers program and the Church’s emergency response programs are examined at length. It is shown that the Church’s emphasis on self-reliance, preparedness, organization and service enables the Church and its members to provide service on a scope which is unparalleled -- service which has positively impacted the lives of millions of people worldwide, justifying the contention that the Church has a valid role as an actor in International Relations.

VI. Chapter Six: The LDS Church in Romania

The LDS Church has a history in Romania going back more than a hundred years. Although there was LDS missionary activity in Romania in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, between World War I and the 1989 Revolution the Church had little access to Romania or the LDS members living there. This situation changed dramatically in 1990 when the first LDS Humanitarian aid arrived in Romania. It was in Romania that the LDS Church first developed the basis of what would become several long term humanitarian programs used worldwide. It was in Romania that the LDS Church first officially used the title “humanitarian missionary”. The story of the Mormons in Romania in many ways is the story in microcosm of the LDS Church and its humanitarian service worldwide.

This chapter discusses the LDS Church in terms of its humanitarian work in Romania. It shows how LDS humanitarian work today was influenced by its initial work in Romania in the 1990s. It also discusses the influence of early Mormon humanitarian missionaries on the current legal, educational and social programs for mentally and physically handicapped individuals in Romania. It shows how Romania’s strong ties with Special Olympics International and other international NGOs began in 1991 when Mormon humanitarian missionaries organized Romania’s first Special Olympics.

The author also discusses how the Mormon humanitarian work in Romania led to the creation of one of the world's foremost nonprofit organizations which provides wheelchairs for humanitarian purposes, The Wheelchair Foundation. Founded by Kenneth Behring (who is not Mormon), at the time of writing his organization had distributed 920,000 wheelchairs worldwide.

VII. Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Chapter seven comprises the overall findings of the author's research.

7.1 Research Question and Methodology

The purpose this research was to establish a reasonable foundation for acceptance of the hypothesis that religion should be considered as a legitimate actor in the field of International Relations. This was accomplished by showing that even a minor religion (in terms of the numbers of its members and their minority status within a state) could be influential in international affairs. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the "Mormon Church", was the test case. The author examined various Church programs which could reasonably qualify the Church as a legitimate actor in world affairs and therefore also in the field of International Relations.

7.2 Meeting the Terms of "Actor"

A key factor in the acceptance of religion as an actor was in proving that a religion – in this case the Mormon Church – qualified as an actor. This was done by showing how the Mormon Church met the terms of the provided definition of "actor", as listed below.

7.2.1 The actor's ability to employ its resources (including organization and members) to fulfill its goals at the world level. The author's research has shown unquestionably that the Church uses its myriad resources to fulfill its goal of serving those in need around the world. This is made possible by its members' willingness to donate of their own time and resources, a willingness which is the direct manifestation of belief in the doctrines of the Church. As a result, the Church has been able to use its resources to serve people on every

populated continent in the world. In other words, the Church as an actor has demonstrated that it is more than able to use its resources to fulfill its goals at the world level.

7.2.2 Acting at a world level With a membership of 14.8 million in 155 countries, the Church is definitely a world organization which operates at a global level. The Church's membership resides throughout the world, necessitating official interaction between Church leadership and government leaders in those countries. With 179 countries receiving Church humanitarian assistance, even those countries where the Church has no members benefit from humanitarian and emergency relief programs operated by the Church. According to the definition, the fact that the Church as an organization regularly interacts at an official level with various government officials and representatives of international NGOs qualifies the Church as an actor in International Relations.

7.2.3 "Bringing their powers to bear on the world" The Church also qualifies as an actor because its activities have influenced the lives of millions of people who are not Church members, actions consistent with an international actor.

During the past thirty years The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has assumed a significant and leading role in humanitarian work and emergency relief aid worldwide. Through this work the Church has formed relationships with the governments of several states and has worked closely in partnership with many national and international organizations. The Church's reputation in the field is such that governments sometimes contact the Church requesting assistance. Church representatives also participate in international committees which determine policy and set standards for certain types of humanitarian initiatives. Literally millions of Church members around the world donate money, expertise, resources and time to help the Church's humanitarian and emergency work every year.

Heads of state, prominent government, religious and business leaders, and representatives of NGOs are regular visitors to the Church's international headquarters in Salt Lake City in the United States. In addition to meetings with top Church leadership their visits usually include tours of the Church's Humanitarian Center and Welfare Square, as well as the Church's Family History Center. What they learn there often translates later into more cooperation with the

Church to implement programs in their own countries. Church leaders also travel regularly to other countries where they meet with top government, religious, educational and civic leaders. These visits can also result in more cooperative efforts.

In the case of the Church, its “power” rests primarily in the willingness of its members to obey Church leadership by serving others, and the organizational structure which helps them to do so in a meaningful way. The material resources which the Church uses as part of this service could never have been accrued without the willing and voluntary participation of its members. Thus, the Church as an actor uses its “powers” (doctrine, organization, membership and physical resources) to “bear on the world” through its service to those in need throughout the world.

7.2.4 “In accordance with their wants and beliefs.” The influence of Church doctrine on its members and their actions cannot be underestimated. It is the key factor as to why the Church has been able to become an influential world actor. Key doctrinal tenets of service to others, obedience to leaders and to law, the importance of family, community involvement, political awareness, striving for self-sufficiency, self-improvement and willingness to give of time, talents and resources all contribute to the Church’s role as an actor in international affairs and its efficacy as such. In the case of the Church, its “wants and beliefs” are the motivating factors for everything it does. This is witnessed by the fact that the Church spends millions of dollars and man hours every year in countries without Mormon congregations, and in helping people who are not now and will probably never be Mormons. It also explains how the Church was able to help its own refugees and to establish schools, houses of worship and community infrastructure even though as a body it had basically no money during most of its first century.

7.3 The Roles of Doctrine and Organization

The Church has been able to succeed as an international actor because of (1) the nature of its doctrine, (2) the willingness of its members to integrate that doctrine into their daily lives, and (3) an organizational structure which facilitates the practical implementation of this doctrine on behalf of those in need. All three facets are integral factors in the Church’s ability to act internationally. Without the integrated use of all three – doctrine, implementation and

organization – the Church would lack the resources and manpower which it calls upon now to assess and address need on such an international scale.

7.4 Summary

The purpose of this research was to demonstrate that religion should be given credibility as a legitimate actor in international affairs by the field of International Relations. In order to prove this conclusively, it was demonstrated that even a “minor” religion (“minor” in terms of number of members) could have an influence in world affairs and thereby be considered an international actor under the terms of the provided definition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the “Mormons”) was the test case.

The author’s supposition that the role of religion (especially as actor) has been largely ignored by International Relations scholars was born out by the dearth of scholarly literature available on the subject. The little which has been written addresses the role of major religions, or religion as a factor in conflict. The role of minor religions in non-conflict international roles has not been written about. This research is a first step towards redressing that lack.

It was shown that the test case – The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – met each criterion of the specified definition of an “actor”, and does indeed function as an actor at an international level. This is largely due to the influence of the Church’s doctrine in the lives of its members. The Church’s humanitarian initiatives and emergency response activities worldwide are the physical manifestations of the doctrine which its member adhere to.

The author showed that the Church’s humanitarian, emergency response, welfare, education and volunteer programs (many of which complement the UN’s Millennium Development Goals) were created as the result of Mormon religious doctrine, and are able to continue operating for the same reasons. She contends that because the Church works closely as a partner with major NGOs which *are* recognized by IR scholars as legitimate actors, the Church should also receive the same status as they do in the eyes of the field of International Relations.

Finally, because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a “minor” religion by definition and by numbers, qualifies as an actor in International Relations, it follows that religion itself - whether major or minor – must also be considered as a legitimate actor. The logical progression, then, is that because religion can be an actor, its role and influence needs to be studied more intensively than it is now. This has been conclusively shown by the author’s research.

Table of Contents

<u>Key words and Glossary</u>	i
--	---

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction of Research Topic	1
1.2 The Definition of “Actor”	2
1.3 The Definition of “Religion”	3
1.4 The Definition of a “Minor Religion”	5
1.5 The Definition of a “Church”	5
1.6 Why Religion Has Been Ignored in International Relations	6
1.7 Events Leading to Changes in IRs’ Perceptions of Religion as an Actor	8
1.8 The Relevance of Religion in International Relations	13
1.9 The Mormons as a Test Case	18
1.10 Brief Description of Chapters	21

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 A Lack of Literature	25
2.3 Huntington	26
2.4 Religion as a Factor in Conflict	26
2.5 Researchers of Religion as a Player in IR	27

2.6 The Mormons and International Relations	37
2.7 Implications	42
2.8 The Contribution of My Research	43

Chapter Three: Who Are the Mormons?

3.1 Introduction	45
3.2 Mormon Demographics	46
3.3. A Brief History of the Mormon Church.	50
3.4 Mormon Doctrine	54
3.5 Mormon Church Policies: Service, Obedience and Leadership	68
3.6 The Image of the Mormons	73
3.7 Positive Images of the Mormons	79
3.8 Reactions of the Mormon Church to Common Images	80
3.9 Conclusion: Who are the Mormons and What Do They Believe?	85

Chapter Four: Humanitarian Work

4.1 Introduction	87
4.2 LDS Humanitarian Services / LDS Charities	89
4.3 Clean Water Initiatives	102
4.4 Neonatal Resuscitation Training	119
4.5 Vision	125
4.6 Wheelchairs and Mobility Aids	133

4.7 Immunizations	142
4.8 Food Production	148
4.9 Conclusions: LDS Humanitarian Initiatives	155

Chapter Five: Welfare, Education, Volunteer and Emergency Services

5.1 Introduction	158
5.2 LDS Welfare Services	159
5.3 Educational Programs	173
5.4 Helping Hands	178
5.5 Disaster and Emergency Relief	190
5.6 Conclusions	206

Chapter Six: The LDS Church in Romania

6.1 Introduction	208
6.2 Early LDS History in Romania	208
6.3 LDS Visits in the Communist Period	210
6.4 The Beginning of LDS Humanitarian Work in Romania	211
6.5 Initial Humanitarian Projects	213
6.6 The First Romanian Special Olympics	218
6.7 LDS Charities' Humanitarian Activity during the First Two Decades	225
6.8 Current State of the LDS Church in Romania	234
6.9 Conclusions	234

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Research Question and Methodology	236
7.2 Literature	237
7.3 Research Conclusions	238
7.4 Summary	242

<u>Bibliography</u>	244
--------------------------------------	-----

<u>Photograph and Graphics Credits</u>	301
---	-----

Appendices

1. LDS Population in Comparison to Other Religions	302
2. Overlap Between MD Goals and Permanent LDS Initiatives	303
3. Overlap Between LDS Initiatives and The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	304
4. LDS Charities Statistics – 2012	306
5. Countries Which Have Received Aid from LDS Charities	307
6. Transcription of the 1838 “Extermination Order”	310
7. 1976 Executive Order to Rescind “Extermination Order”	311
8. Illinois House Resolution – Apology to Mormons	312
9. Knowledge of Religions in Israel – Survey	315

<u>Acknowledgements</u>	317
--	-----

Glossary and Keywords

Apostle – a member of the highest hierarchy of leadership in the LDS Church

Bishop - the lay leader of a local LDS congregation

Branch President - the lay leader of a smaller local LDS congregation

Elder – formal title used for male LDS missionaries and adult male LDS Church members

First Presidency – the ruling body of the LDS Church, headed by the president/prophet of the Church and his counselors (usually two, but sometimes three)

Humanitarian Missionary – a voluntary LDS missionary (usually an older person) whose primary responsibility is the administration of humanitarian projects

LDS - members, doctrines or activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

members - people who are baptized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Mission – a specific area and time period in which a missionary serves

Missionary – an LDS Church member who has officially been given the responsibility of either proselyting or doing service fulltime in a specified area, without pay, for 18 – 24 months

Mormon - members, doctrines or activities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Presiding Bishop – the leader responsible for all of the temporal affairs of the LDS Church, including welfare services

Priesthood – the authority given to LDS males to administer the affairs of the LDS Church

Sister – formal title used for female LDS missionaries, and female adult members

the Church - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

KEYWORDS: humanitarian, LDS, minority, Mormon, religion