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# Ideals of Mormons and Gentiles In Utah and other States

VIRGIL B. SMITH\*

It has been reported by Bishop Pike (1967) that the percentage of U.S. population affiliated with a church has changed recently from an increasing trend to a decreasing trend. He claimed that during this same period there has been an increase in the sale of books about religious topics.<sup>1</sup> One possible interpretation of these two findings is that there may be differences in the values which are held by church members and others.

How may such values be measured? One way is that used by Christie and Merton (1958) to measure the values of medical students.<sup>2</sup> Using a similar technique, I attempted to measure some values of college students by having them anonymously mark semantic differential scales (Osgood, 1957) to describe what the phrase "ideal people" meant to them.<sup>3</sup> The adjectives used at opposite ends of the seven step scales were: careless/accurate, foolish/wise, restrictive/democratic, negative/positive, boring/interesting, selfish/unselfish, changeable/stable, dishonest/honest, inefficient/efficient, unfair/fair, illogical/logical, and worthless/valuable. These scales were marked first by 254 students at a public Utah college, 76 percent of whom were Mormons. Because The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not decreased in size but has continued a steady growth, it was assumed that the Mormon sample's average

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<sup>1</sup>James A. Pike, unpublished speech at Central Washington State College, Ellensburg, Washington, 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Christie and Robert K. Merton, *Procedures for the Sociological Study of the Values Climate of Medical Schools*, *Journal of Medical Education*, Vol. 33 (10) Part 2, pp. 125-153.

<sup>3</sup>Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measurement of Meaning* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 342.

scores on the scales would represent values of people relatively satisfied with their church membership, and that the non-Mormon scores would represent values of people who were not so satisfied.

In this exploratory study it was found that the average mark of the Mormon students was closer to the idealistic end of all of these scales, compared to the average mark of the other students (see figure 1). The mean scores of both groups were on the more "ideal" half of the scales, but the Mormon scores indicated the Mormons placed the higher value on being accurate, wise, democratic, positive, unselfish, stable, honest, efficient, fair, and logical, and that ideal people were more interesting and valuable. On 11 of these 12 scales this difference was statistically significant because it was too large to attribute to chance. The scale showing an insignificant amount of difference was the "changeable/stable" scale. Are these differences to be found with Gentiles in other states too?

To check on this, the scales were given to Gentiles in three other states, and the Utah Mormon sample was compared with these other non-Mormon samples (of about 200 students each) in public colleges of Washington, Louisiana, and Ohio. In all three of these comparisons, the results contradicted the findings within Utah. For example, the average responses of Washington and Louisiana Gentiles were essentially the same as Utah Mormons, and in contrast to the 11 significant differences found between the Mormons and the Utah Gentiles, only three significant differences were found between Ohio Gentiles and Utah Mormons. I interpreted these three later comparisons to mean that the differences between the two Utah responses could not be explained on the basis of Mormon affiliation alone.

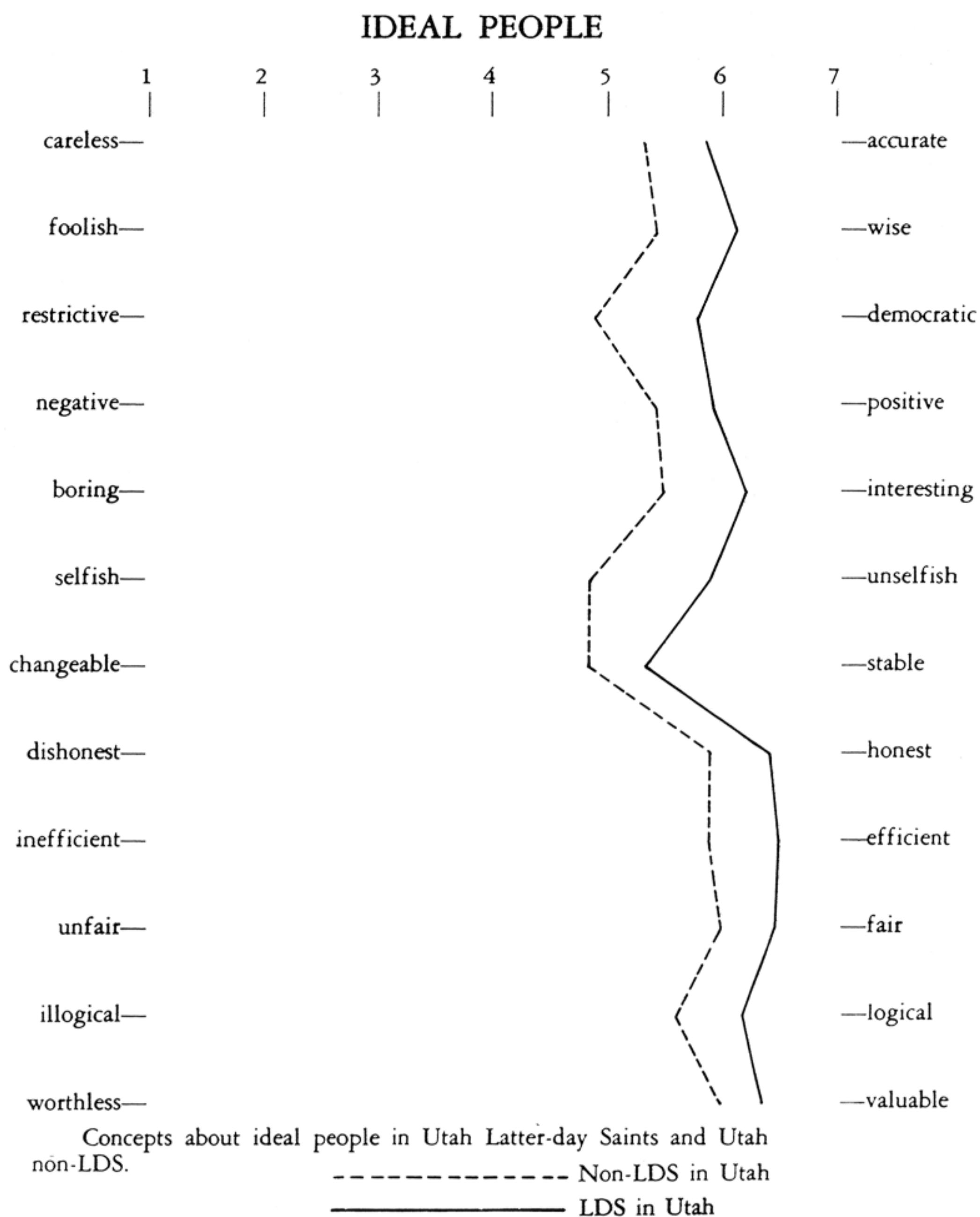
What could explain them then? One possible explanation is implicit in an assertion by Marden and Meyer (1962) that dominant group members share a common value system, different from the minority group which they dominate.<sup>4</sup> To investigate the dominant-minority difference further, the scales were given to about 70 Negro public college students in Louisiana. When their average responses were compared with those of the Louisiana white students, five significant differences

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<sup>4</sup>Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer, *Minorities in American Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Book Co., 1962), 497 pp.



were found. When the average Negro responses were compared with those of the Utah Mormons, the Mormon scores were also found to be significantly different on five scales. This was almost identical with the Louisiana white differences. On four of these scales, the Mormon sample differed significantly from both the Negro sample and Utah Gentile sample: honest, fair, positive, efficient. And on these same four scales the Mormon responses were the same as those of the other two non-Catholic dominant groups. On three of these scales the Catholic dominant group was the same as the Mormons. To this extent the dominant group members *did* share values. The



two minority groups shared three values on which they were significantly different from all the dominant groups: "unselfish," "fair," and "logical."

Although such evidence lends support to a dominant-minority explanation of differences, other evidence does not. For example, on five scales the Mormon scores were similar to all the non-Utah scores, including the Negro scores. In other words, only the Utah Gentiles responded differently in these cases. It would seem that the five groups who share these values have a better chance for successful communication and mutual acceptance than do the two Utah groups.

Without more information, it is not clear why there are so many differences between the Utah samples. Perhaps the differences in the values studied here, combined with other values not studied here (on caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, etc.), are magnified and multiplied by closer contact between these two groups.