

# REVIEW

## SEX EDUCATION MATERIALS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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One of the responsibilities facing Latter-day Saint parents today is that of teaching children about reproduction and sexual relationships. Most Mormon parents feel as Dr. Benjamin Spock does—"that sex should be taught in a framework that emphasizes its spirituality. It is a distortion of sexuality in human beings to act as if it were merely a matter of anatomy and physiology."

It is a challenge to parents to develop healthy sexual attitudes and values of their own. It is a greater challenge to find ways to convey these attitudes and values lovingly to their children. In an effort to assist parents in teaching sex education within the family framework, several LDS writers have published books which deal with the subject in various ways. In reviewing materials written in the context of the Latter-Day Saints, I found it helpful to put them into three categories: 1) Books suitable for young children; 2) Books written primarily for teen-agers and young adults; 3) Books written as instructive aids for couples already married, or for those approaching marriage.

### *Children's Books*

Unfortunately, there are no really first-rate books in this category written by LDS authors. One book obviously written for young children is *Spiritual Truths of Reproduction*, by Lenet Read and Shauna Valentine. The spiritual concepts in the book are abstract and the facts about reproduction incomplete, and, in some ways, misleading. Following a description of nursing a baby, the authors state: "Father begins a new life by using a pattern that is similar to nursing." This statement seems to leave an erroneous impression with the child that would have to be corrected later on.

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*You Were Smaller Than a Dot*, a book hardly larger than a dot, was written by Dr. Glen C. Griffin, and has a very limited text, one line to a page. Each statement is accompanied by a simple line drawing. It is a factual book, but not very substantial.

In my opinion, the best book for young children is the non-LDS classic, by Sidonie Gruenberg, *The Wonderful Way You Were Born*. Available now in paperback, this remarkable book deserves its popularity because of its excellent text and charming illustrations. Gruenberg handles the story of reproduction with love and concern that Mormon parents can approve.

### *Books For Teens and Young Adults*

Several LDS writers have made contributions in this category. *About Life and Love*, by Dr. W. Dean Belnap and Dr. Glenn Griffin, subtitled, "Facts of Life for LDS Teens," is written by two M.D.'s with broad experience in counseling young people. The text relates LDS scripture, doctrine, and values to sex education, thoroughly explaining the biological facts of human reproduction. The authors consider sexual experiences normal, happy, and praiseworthy gifts when confined to the marriage relationship. They discuss the broad spectrum of human relationships involved in family living and the growing processes of young people. One of the book's strengths is the calm, understanding way in which it discusses perplexing problems of teen-agers and their parents.

The weaknesses are in the attitudes of the authors on woman's place in society. Statements such as, "The thing that disturbs us is the role of the male and female in our culture. The evil is not in the emancipation of woman—but some women want to be governors, generals, and even presidents. This problem has reached an extreme in America today with woman doctors, lawyers, marines, police and politicians demanding equal pay as men and displacing men in the ranks of the unemployed" (p. 32). The authors go on to say, "We feel that girls and woman are happier in the role of girls and women. We feel that these types of careers are not in the best spiritual and psychological interest of a young girl today" (p. 10).

I feel that Drs. Belnap and Griffin are showing their male-authoritarian-chauvinism by making such arbitrary comments. Their concept of "suitable" roles for girls and women is an extremely narrow one. These statements are, however, typical of the attitudes found in all of the books reviewed.

Another false assumption found in *About Life and Love* is that "women have a weak or moderate sex urge but a very strong maternal instinct" (p. 104). Both premises are as out of date as the hobble skirt. Women, like men, feel the entire spectrum of sexual desire, capacity, and interest. These doctors should know that sex roles, including the so-called maternal "instincts," are more often learned than genetically inherited.

*Virtue Makes Sense*, by Mark Peterson and Emma Marr Peterson, is another book written for teenagers. It discusses virtue by exploring questions the authors consider relevant: Is there a God?, Darwin's theories of evolution, dress standards, modesty, smoking, drinking, alcohol, and premarital sex. The text is written as a series of lectures given by a fictional LDS institute instructor. It lacks warmth, emphasizing the more negative aspects of sex education. The

discussion on Darwin seems irrelevant and contrived. The book does provide some guidelines for the young person seeking spiritual reinforcement.

*Sacred or Secret*, by Ernest Eberhard, Jr., is identified as a "parent's handbook for sexuality guidance of their children." The author explains the use of the term "sexuality" as its "full, positive and divine meaning—not in the narrow physical sense in which sex is used and portrayed by a sensual and perverted world which knows little or nothing of its eternal purpose and the possibilities of man's procreative power" (p. 21).

The book is meant to help parents teach their children about reproduction in stages defined from early childhood through the teen years. It is accurate, factual, and positive. The author tries to dispel the myth that sex is dirty, mysterious, taboo, or unhealthy. The book is family oriented with much material about family attitudes, values, and the sharing of knowledge. The information about reproduction and the birth process is valuable to parents needing help in explaining these processes to their children.

The book is hampered by statements such as "Patriotism is a form of sexuality expression" (p. 60). The assertion that "self abuse does not quickly lead to insanity or severe permanent physical or mental degradation if it is stopped" (p. 108) carries unfortunate implications. In spite of some repetition and redundancy, the book is recommended as one that could be helpful to parents looking for ways to teach sex education in the home.

#### *Adult Books for the Married or About To Be Married*

*And They Shall Be One Flesh*, by Dr. Lindsay Curtis, is an excellent book for married or soon-to-be married couples. Formerly called "A Sensible Guide to Sex," the book is exactly what it says it is—a sensible guide. It is not only concise, factual, and accurate, but it lacks the sermonizing and "preachiness" of the other books. Dr. Curtis takes the same positive attitude toward sex that some of the other authors do, trying to dispel the notion that sex is only for procreation. "To relegate sexual intercourse to the single purpose of procreation is to equate it with the same act in lower animals since this is its only purpose in other than human beings" (p. 35). He emphatically states that the sexual union is a gift from God given for the pleasure and joy of the participants. Dr. Curtis covers such subjects as the sex act (about which he is very explicit), control of conception, the man's role (great advice from a woman's point of view), the in-laws, the woman's role, the need for communication in sexual fulfillment, and various other sex-related subjects. This book, with its helpful approach to the sexual experience, offers valuable insights into the often limited information many LDS couples have. It would be worthwhile reading for any married couple.

A book of even more explicit help is Dr. Curtis' *Increasing Sexual Fulfillment*. In this short book the author discusses some of the complaints couples have in trying to achieve a successful and fulfilling sexual relationship. Some of the subjects include premature ejaculation, impotency, failure to achieve a climax, unnecessary modesty, myths and misunderstandings—both cultural and religious—that hamper a good sexual relationship. Dr. Curtis provides up-to-date information about current sex research in terms the lay reader can understand.

Offering realistic solutions and expert advice, this book is recommended for the more mature married couple who might need special help.

In general all of the books mentioned in this review have much valuable information; they also have weaknesses. Each one could be improved by a first-rate editing job. The rhetoric is sometimes stilted and the grammar poor. The illustrations are merely adequate. At least one (*About Life and Love*) distorts information about the female reproductive system (p. 47).

Most of the books recommend that people with problems seek counsel and advice from their bishops or other church leaders. This is appropriate advice if the church leader has some competence in and knowledge of sex counseling. Unfortunately, not all do.

If readers are aware of inaccuracies and inadequacies, these books can be helpful resources to sex education in a family setting.

### *List of Books Reviewed*

*The Spiritual Truths of Reproduction*, by Lenet Read and Shaunna Valentine (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press), \$2.95; *You Were Smaller Than a Dot*, by Glen Griffin, M.D. (Bountiful, Utah: Better Books), \$1.95; *The Wonderful Way you were Born*, by Sidonie Gruenberg (New York: Doubleday), \$.95; *About Life and Love*, by W. Dean Belnap, M.D. and Glen C. Griffin, M.D. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), \$4.95; *Sacred or Secret?* by Ernest Eberhard, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft), \$2.95; *And They Shall Be One Flesh*; by Lindsay R. Curtis, M.D. (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press), \$3.00; *Increasing Sexual Fulfillment*, by Lindsay R. Curtis, M.D. (Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publishing Co.), \$2.95; *Virtue Makes Sense*, by Mark E. and Emma Marr Peterson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), \$2.95.

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And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone. . . . Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

*Genesis 2:18, 24-25*

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