

study:

Personality and the Family by Dr. and Mrs. Hornell Hart of Duke University.*

This

book is described by Dr. Noel Keys who teaches a course, "Youth and Marriage," at the

University of California as "An admirable effort to find scientific bases for intelligent

conduct." Besides their presentation of research evidence, the Bahá'í reader will

appreciate the authors' convincing logic, their high, dignified tone and their awareness of

the interdependence of humanity and of the delicate emotional and spiritual aspirations of

the individual.

In these courses, sound answers are given, based on scientific evidence, to such

questions as: What effect, if any, has chastity or promiscuity on married happiness?

Why should promiscuity concern anyone besides the persons practicing it?

Each person would answer such questions in terms of his goal in life. To the materialist, humankind is a highly developed animal whose only goal in life is the ample

gratification of physical appetites. To the ascetic puritan, physical desire and pleasure are

regarded with suspicion as "temptations of the flesh" leading to sin, in creatures

"conceived in iniquity" and "born in evil." To the Bahá'í, the ideal life is both

physical

and spiritual development and happiness. `Abdu'l-Bahá said, "All material things are

for

us so that through our gratitude we may learn to understand life as a divine benefit." "In

creation, there is no evil; all is good." The only evil is misuse.

Bahá'u'lláh

wrote, "All

men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty

beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man."

"Chastity," said Shoghi Effendi, "should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not

only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the

only way to a happy and successful marital life." Dr. Hart and other investigators have

measured the happiness of married persons from different backgrounds and thus are able to distinguish which factors are followed by happiness and which by unhappiness. For example, "the marriages of virgins to virgins are reported as about 30 percent above the average in happiness, while those of thoroughly promiscuous couples are a little more than half as happy as the average." In good scientific tradition, conclusions are questioned: "Conceivably some people are promiscuous because of certain instabilities of personality which would cause unhappiness even if the person were strictly monogamous. However, a number of reasons are apparent why promiscuity should cause unhappiness, and these reasons fit well with the data which have just been cited."

What may these reasons be? Perhaps the most important is spiritual degeneration, which causes the greatest unhappiness. "Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof," Bahá'u'lláh advises us. "Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path." The Harts, as sociologists, affirm this fact: "Studies of actual instances of promiscuous sex relations indicated a very widespread tendency for people who engage in them to take the individualistic rather than the altruistic attitude toward their partners and toward the other personalities involved in their adventures

"In general, Bromley and Britten's data indicate that the more promiscuous a man is, the more callous is his indifference to what happens to his sex partners. The psychological laws which govern social relations make this ruthless individualism unsuccessful as a means of seeking fulfillment of personality. The persons toward whom we take an exploitive or ruthless attitude are practically certain, in the long run, to come to regard us as menacing and damaging stimuli. Toward such stimuli most people take attitudes of reprisal, precautionary attack, or avoidance. The ruthless and exploitive

person, therefore, builds up against himself, in the people around him a rising tide of anger, hatred, and loathing. These emotional forces seek to attack and demolish his personality. The longer he persists in his individualistic exploitation, the stronger becomes this destructive pressure. Instead of fulfillment of personality, he is creating increasingly inevitable damage of personality."

Bahá'u'lláh said, "They that have followed their lusts and corrupt inclinations have erred and dissipated their efforts. They indeed are of the lost." This loss is now seen by sociologists. "When the physiological motive predominates strongly," write the Harts, "esthetic, intellectual, affectional, and social overtones which make love relations intensely beautiful are largely lacking, or are present only in crude and unsatisfactory forms . . . Either the relationships must be kept free from really intense and splendid emotional experience, or one or both of the participants is apt to fall in love with the other. These adventures are likely to build up the habit of casualness — a habit strongly buttressed as a defense against acquiring emotional encumbrances."

Shoghi Effendi said, "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives." How harmful to society? Perhaps it is best shown by these conclusions from a study of the attitude toward marriage of sexually experienced unmarried persons: "Only two-thirds of the women would like to be married and none of the men . . . It is not for love that the women desire marriage but for security, companionship, and protection, and in several cases, for children. The men are afraid of marriage and of fatherhood; all are afraid of the economic burden of a family and some fear the moral obligation of being faithful to one woman."

Of this and similar studies, the Harts write: "Such data confirm the conclusion

that sexual promiscuity does not tend to produce an abundant supply of mentally and physically healthy children. This conclusion will affect various types of people variously. Some men and women care a great deal about whether they participate normally and creatively in the processes of the universe of which they are a part

"Many other people are indifferent to any racial significance of their lives. They want merely to have an exciting time with their bodies and in their social relationships. Such people, today, are given a good deal of freedom to make that choice and to live that sort of life . . . The attempt to ignore the larger and more fundamental racial meanings of one's existence may, however, involve a series of unexpectedly painful maladjustments and failures. In the long run the inexorable processes of survival will ruthlessly eliminate from the earth those biological and social groups who prefer sexual promiscuity to creative parenthood."

Shoghi Effendi said, "Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society." The assertion that one couple's promiscuousness affects no one else and is therefore of no concern to society is discussed by the Harts: "Advocates of more freedom have urged that sex relations should be regarded as a personal matter, and should be no more interfered with or regulated than are friendships. But the study of history and of ethnology indicates that in all probability there has never been a culture in which sex relations have not been regulated by public sentiment, if not by laws. The reason for this is readily seen in the nature of expanded personalities. People interpenetrate each other; they are emotionally parts of each other. Rare is the couple which does not have, on one or both sides, parents, brothers, sisters, or close friends in whose lives they play a vital part. Even if a couple should be completely independent of these social bonds, their conduct affects the general patterns

of sexual
conduct, and every member of society feels that those patterns are likely to
menace or
bleed his own life."

Thus, we can see how emphatically a scientific, sociological approach to sex
conduct affirms the teachings of the Manifestations. While enrolled in the
course under
Dr. Noel Keys, I marveled at the unerring wisdom of the Revelators of God, Who,
with
no scientific research at Their disposal, knew how to guide men to the only way
of life
which could give the greatest happiness which God intended for them. This
academic
course, more than any other, helped me to appreciate the meaning of these words
from
the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that
which
injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them . . . We find some
men desiring
liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of
ignorance . . . That
which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from
his own
ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty
causeth man
to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his
station. It
debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness . . . Say: The
liberty that
profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the
Eternal
Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the
dominion of
earth and heaven."

* Personality and the Family, by Hornell Hart and Ella B. Hart (Boston, D. C.
Heath, 1935 / 1941).

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