
THE MODERN MOVEMENT FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WOMEN

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L'auteure expose les grandes lignes des origines, des buts, et des caractéristiques de la "droite" religieuse (la "majorité morale" des Etats-Unis et la "majorité modérée" au Canada). Elle examine les rapports religieux du mouvement de la "féminité fascinante", et note la variété de ses origines religieuses. Elle établit ensuite un parallèle entre ce mouvement moderne et un mouvement similaire du 19e siècle.

Puisque l'appropriation par les hommes du travail domestique des femmes est central au capitalisme, le mouvement contemporain glorifie le rôle traditionnel des femmes, celui de service et de soutien. Sa stratégie est de renforcer le conditionnement social des femmes et de leur faire assumer les points de vue et les intérêts des hommes dans leurs vies.

Seules les féministes chrétiennes des principales religions et des organisations majeures se sont opposées, d'une manière organisée, à ce mouvement. Les leaders hommes ont en général gardé le silence sur ce sujet. L'auteure pense qu'il est cependant très important de comprendre ce mouvement pour pouvoir en contre-

carrer les stratégies.

The recent rise of the politicized religious right has received considerable attention from feminist and non-feminist writers alike. Feminists have taken particular note of the supposedly "pro-family" platform of the Moral Majority in the U.S. and the Moderate Majority in Canada. What has been overlooked is that the major elements of the right's directives on gender relations were already in place and packaged for mass consumption long before the Moral Majority was even a gleam in Jerry Falwell's eye!

Beginning in the 1960s, this work was done by such people as Helen Andelin, whose *Fascinating Womanhood*, originally published in 1963, had sold 400,000 copies by 1975; Marabel Morgan, whose *The Total Woman* was the best-selling non-fiction book in the U.S. in 1974; Bill Gothard, founder of the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, whose mass seminars were attracting 200,000 by 1973 (and 330,000 in 1982), and a mass of other writers too numerous to list

here. The volume of literature, films, tapes, and seminars, and the number of people involved amount to nothing less than a major movement for the submission of women (to men).

Most of its concepts are as ancient as patriarchy itself — that is, its ideology is ancient but it is presented in modern dress. Its origins lie in diverse religious roots, including fundamentalist Protestantism (which in Canada produced such organizations as "Woman Alive" and "Women Aglow" and in the U.S., "Successful Fulfilled Womanhood," "Working Women," "The Womanhood," and "Women Aglow") and some sectors of the charismatic movement, with adherents in the main-line, so-called "liberal" churches and some Episcopalian and Anglo-Catholic groups. Its influence extends far beyond such religious groups, however, through the participation of many non-church people in its seminars and the massive pervasiveness of its huge volume of materials. Although its leaders are white and middle-class, the movement's vocabulary and style are es-

entially "populist," designed for mass appeal. Its primary aim is to restore "God's order," that is, patriarchy, often conceptualized as a chain of command, beginning with "the family." The family is perceived as having been seriously undermined by the youth dissent of the 1960s, feminism, "secular humanism," and, more recently, the gay movement. "God's order" in the public domain is seen as inseparable from God's order in the private domain in terms of the crucial socializing of children into dominance-submission relations and in terms of the general issue of male hegemony over women. Thus, ironically, these right-wing Christians agree implicitly with Kate Millett's dictum, "the personal is political."

There are many parallels between this contemporary movement and the nineteenth-century activities of the Clapham sect, a group of Anglican evangelicals (1780-1840) which contributed greatly to the formation of Victorian "domestic ideology." For example, both used all the media available to them, both developed many rules and formulas for daily life, both vehemently attacked the feminism of their time, both have worked to expand and romanticize the association of women with the domestic sphere and the separation of women from labour outside the home. Predictably, since men's appropriation of women's domestic labour is central to both patriarchy and capitalism, the contemporary female-submission movement uses every theological legitimation it can devise to glorify the "traditional" serving and supportive roles of women, particularly their labour in the home. For example, the goals and wishes of those "in authority," particularly of husbands, are made sacred by seeing them as indistinguishable from God's perspectives, since it is claimed that God works solely through these "authorities." The general strategy of the movement is to reinforce the already-existing social conditioning of women so that women take on the per-

spectives and further the interests of males in their lives — husbands, sons, employers, and so on — regardless of the women's own interests. Power thus becomes less visible because, with such docile subordinates, its exercise will meet with less resistance and the need for overt coercion will be much reduced (although coercion remains always available, of course).

The movement, again predictably, denounces vehemently the employment of wives, which the movement claims will produce an inevitable cataclysm of ills, the most significant of which is said to be the "economic independence" of wives. For example, Tim La Haye is typical when he argues against the employment of wives because "... it breeds a feeling of independence and self-sufficiency which God did not intend a married woman to have ... I am convinced that one of the reasons young married couples divorce so readily today is because the wife is not economically dependent upon her husband" (*How to Be Happy Though Married*, p. 29). A partial explanation for the emergence of this movement in the 1960s is that it is a defensive ideological reaction to the increase in the employment of married women in response to the tremendous expansion of capitalism in the 1950s. Such participation was seen to pose a possible threat to the leisured status of men in their homes and to the hegemony inherent in being the sole breadwinners — hence to their "masculine" status and identity. In this way, despite its totally uncritical acceptance of capitalism, the movement's ideology runs counter to the demands of capital for women as a reserve army of labour.

The only organized and sustained opposition to this movement which has focussed specifically on its theological and biblical legitimations has come from Christian feminists, within mainline denominations and through such organizations as the Evangelical Women's Caucus International (which is not funda-

mentalist!) and Canadian Women and Religion. With some notable exceptions, even supposedly "progressive," "pro-justice" male theologians and church leaders have remained remarkably silent about this female-submission movement. When challenged by Christian feminists, their response has been either to trivialize the issue or to deny it implied anything for their sector of the Christian church.

It was only when the religious right became organized politically and openly moved its doctrines into the public arena that these church leaders, along with male academics and journalists, suddenly became prepared to treat it seriously. However, they continue to remain oblivious to the origins of the politicized right and to its significance. The subjugation of women now, as in the past, is crucial for the success of any effective suppression of dissent and enforcement of docility in society as a whole. Furthermore, if one is able to understand the precise principles and practices whereby this subjugation of women has been attempted, one can predict and try to counter the strategies likely to be employed when the entire society becomes the target.

Further Reading:

Helen Andelin. *Fascinating Womanhood*.

Tim La Haye. *How to Be Happy Though Married*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1960.

Judith Miles. *The Feminine Principle*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975.

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