

Back to the Dollhouse: A Look at Fascinating Womanhood

by Marianne and Jonathan Butler

If you are a wife who wants to improve her marriage, "Next time you are angry with your husband, why not try some childlike mannerisms: stomp your foot, lift your chin high and square your shoulders. . . . Or, beat your fists on your husband's chest . . . saying, for example, 'How can a great big man like you pick on a poor little helpless girl?' . . . The reason children tend to exaggerate is due to their impotence. . . . Therefore, when a woman uses this same method, she gives the man the impression that she also is impotent and helpless and therefore childlike."

Be soft, delicate, submissive and dependent upon your man for his masculine help and protection. Lack any "male aggressiveness, competency, efficiency, fearlessness, strength and *'the ability to kill your own snakes.'*" Acquire a feminine appearance by "*accentuating the difference* between yourself and men, not the similarities." Wear "anything fluffy, lacy, gauzy or elaborate." Include in your wardrobe "chiffon, silk, lace, velvet, satin, fur, angora and organ-die. . . . Avoid such materials as tweeds, herringbones, hard finish woolens, denims, glen plaids, faint dark plaids, pinstripes, shepherd checks and geometrics, since these are materials that men wear."

"Stop mowing the lawn, fixing the roof, painting the fence or repairing the furnace. Stop

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doing anything which requires masculine strength, skill or ability. Then, let him do things for you. . . . It is difficult to describe how seriously women rob men of their masculinity by becoming independent. A competent woman stands as a threat to the male ego—to his position and capabilities as a man. When he comes in contact with a capable, efficient woman, well able to get along without him or any other man, he does not feel masculine any longer."

"To be feminine, don't compete with men in anything which requires masculine ability. . . . Don't compete with men for advancement on a job, for higher pay, or greater honors. Don't compete with them in men's subjects. It may be all right to win over a man in English or Social Studies, but you are in trouble if you compete with a man in math, chemistry, public speaking, etc. Don't appear to know more than a man does in world events, the space program, or science or industry. . . . When expressing your viewpoint use words that indicate insight such as 'I feel.' Avoid the words 'I think,' or 'I know.'"*

If all this smacks of a Victorian tract, it is because that is nearly the case. The author of *Fascinating Womanhood*, from which these quotations come, freely acknowledges that her book was "inspired by a series of booklets published in the 1920's, entitled *The Secrets of Fascinating Womanhood*." Helen B. Andelin, a 55-year-old Mormon mother of eight children, has published a kind of handbook for reviving drooping marriages. Since its publication in 1965, the book has sold over 400,000 hardcover copies.

*All quotations in the article are taken from Helen B. Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood*, revised edition (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1965; Bantam Books, 1975).

Mrs. Andelin has also established a Fascinating Womanhood Foundation in Santa Barbara, California, to train teachers in the art of making women into "Domestic Goddesses." In 14 years, 11,000 teachers have been trained and 300,000 women have enrolled in an eight-week, \$15 course. Among the course materials is a \$12.50 kit that includes a Domestic Goddess Planning Notebook for listing household chores and a Love Book for recording the sweet-nothings grateful husbands whisper when their wives become more fascinating.

In a decade of women's lib, consciousness raising and an amendment for equal rights and equal pay for women (a decade not too unlike the 1920s), Mrs. Andelin speaks of "woman's place" in the home and on the pedestal (also reminiscent of the 1920s). Conservative, middle-class housewives eagerly feed on Andelin's counsel, as an alternative to that of Betty Friedan or Kate Millet. And Seventh-day Adventist housewives, as well, seem hungry for the Andelin thesis. Conference retreats and week-night meetings are devoted to putting "sparkle" back into the marriage of Adventist ministers and laymen through Fascinating Womanhood. A well-worn pink paperback of the revised edition rests on many an Adventist end table.

What does *Fascinating Womanhood* offer this receptive audience?

For "a generation of women so disillusioned, disappointed, and unhappy in marriage," *Fascinating Womanhood* is designed to teach how to be loved and adored in marriage. Mrs. Andelin promises that the woman, by herself, can transform her marriage into a heaven on earth by obeying certain laws. She can become "The Ideal Woman," "The Kind of Woman a Man Wants," for "a woman holds within her grasp the possibilities of a heavenly marriage," says Andelin. "She can bring it about independent of any deliberate action on the part of the husband. . . . A woman holds the keys to her own happiness."

Fascinating Womanhood adopts a first century chain of being that subordinates woman to man, and infuses it with a nineteenth century romanticism which lifts woman to a pedestal of romantic adoration. Andelin terms this "Celestial Love" and cites as examples the love of John

Alden for Priscilla, Woodrow Wilson for his wife Ellen and Shah Jahan for Mumtaz.

The book complains of the modern effort to replace marital "patriarchy" with "equality" where husbands and wives make "mutual" decisions. Mrs. Andelin finds this to be impractical and unworkable as a family arrangement, for the family can serve only one master. Moreover, "since the man is by nature and tempera-

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ment a born leader, he is the logical one to lead. Men have inherent traits of leadership, tend to be decisive and have the courage of their convictions. . . ."

Not only is wifely subservience part of the natural order for Andelin, but a result of biblical injunction as well. "Keeping the man at the head of the family . . . is largely a matter of following God's instruction," Andelin asserts, as she appropriates a number of prooftexts in her behalf: Genesis 3:16 ("thy husband . . . shall rule over thee"), Colossians 3:18 ("wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands"), Ephesians 5:33 ("wife . . . reverence her husband"), 1 Peter 3:1 ("wives, be in subjection to your own husbands"), Ephesians 5:23 ("For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church"). Here Andelin is entirely naive about the question of cultural conditioning in these Jewish, and primarily Pauline Scriptures, while she conveniently ignores possibly the one scripture on the subject that transcends its cultural milieu: Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither male nor female . . . in Christ Jesus").

In any case, *Fascinating Womanhood* makes only expedient use of the *New Testament*. Celestial Love is actually more an offspring of medieval chivalry or Victorian romance than first century biblical marriage. And Andelin displays no biblical prooftexts to support her idea of romantic love. While there are a few notable illustrations of romance in the *Bible*, romantic

love as “a feeling almost like pain,” as “enchantment” and “fascination,” as “the deeper, more spiritual feeling almost like worship,” hardly has a biblical ring.

Andelin relies on the nineteenth century novels of Dickens, Hugo and Thackeray rather than the Bible, to illustrate romantic love. Moreover, her *Celestial Love* appears more at home in the *Book of Mormon* than the *Bible*. The Mormon idea of “celestial marriage” gives men exclusive privilege to the priesthood, and makes women dependent upon men and upon marriage for exaltation in the afterlife, and subordinate to men within the family on this earth. The adoration of woman, itself a dubious concept, comes only as a result of her role as wife and mother.

Another home for *Celestial Love* is fantasy-land. Mrs. Andelin revels in her childhood dreams of the handsome prince seeking her out, then sweeping her away to his kingdom. Snow White and Cinderella were among her favorite stories. In her own fairy tale, “the ideal woman, from a man’s point of view” is what she calls “angela human.” Her “human qualities” include femininity, radiant happiness, fresh radiant health and childlikeness. Her “angelic qualities” are that she understands men, has deep inner happiness, has a worthy character, and is a domestic goddess. “The human side of woman fascinates, amuses, captivates and enchants man. It arouses a desire to protect and shelter. . . . The angelic side of woman arouses in man a feeling approaching worship. These qualities bring peace and happiness to a man.”

What the fantasy leads to is a kind of phoniness. On the one hand, the woman plays the role of a petulant child in order to manipulate her man, and on the other, she assumes a mystic superiority to inspire devotion.

In pouting, appearing downcast, stomping her foot, the woman adopts so-called childlike behavior. (Andelin actually applies Matthew 18:3 here: “Except ye . . . become as little children. . .”). One questions whether such actions are appropriate for a child, much less an adult. And Andelin warns, “some of these actions may seem unnatural to you, at first. If they do, you will have to be an actress to succeed in childlike anger, even if only a ham actress. But remember, you will be launching an acting career which will

save you pain, tension, frustration, a damaged relationship and perhaps even save a marriage. . . .” Men never want their women to grow up completely. The ideal wife is a child to be protected and coddled. To get ideas on how to dress, “visit a little girls’ shop.”

And if such hypocrisy can save marriages, why not a little of the double-standard as well? “A man wants a woman of fine character, one he can place on a pedestal and hold in highest

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regard,” comments Andelin. “Not only does he expect her to be good, but he expects her to be better than he is. He hopes that she will be kinder, more patient, forgiving and unselfish than he, and hold more valiantly to principle.” Such a charade not only severs men and women from their humanity, but seems to remove them from basic Christianity, too.

But playing the role brings its own reward. Submissive, infantile, pert, the woman receives handsome payoffs from a solicitous husband. The bread cast upon the waters comes back buttered. India’s Mumtaz and Shah Jahan were of a culture where women were inferior, dependent and “kept their place” in the feminine sphere, without demanding equality with man. “And yet,” exclaims Mrs. Andelin, “her husband gave to her the greatest token of love that man has ever given to a woman, in the Taj Mahal.” Such booty evidently makes a life of confinement in the golden cage all worthwhile for the Fascinating Woman.

Her life in the world is lived only vicariously through her husband. As a Fascinating Woman she foregoes any notion of developing her own potential apart from her husband: “The Domestic Goddess . . . is not looking for some challenging achievement in the world of men for fulfillment. . . . A threat to the man’s position occurs when a woman pursues other interests such as the development of talents. . . . A girl

should not center her education around a career, in which she becomes independent. . . . She will just naturally be tempted to use her knowledge at some time or another." It is a man's world and "there doesn't seem to be any way that a woman can step into the man's world . . . without losing some of her womanliness." Fascinating Women find "their 'bluebird of happiness' lies within their own walls."

Paradoxically, Mrs. Andelin would confine most women to domesticity, while she herself maintains a booming career, writing, lecturing, holding seminars, counseling, earning money and promoting her Fascinating Womanhood Foundation. She sees no conflict between her ideology and this life-style, and does not admit that it may be actually this *career* that provides her a sense of real fulfillment. And there is the further irony that her husband has given up his dental practice to manage the affairs of her empire—hardly the formula prescribed in *Fascinating Womanhood*.

Andelin assumes that most women work because they want a diversion or desire luxuries, when in actual fact most women work out of necessity. What relevance does her book have for the majority of working women?

And little account is taken of the woman who is widowed or divorced. If she has religiously avoided the development of her capabilities, how does she then support herself and the brood of children she may have acquired? Even Mrs. Andelin admits that husbands would like the assurance that their wives can take on "masculine" responsibilities if absolutely necessary. Yet the Fascinating Woman spends her life leaning on her husband, allowing him to earn the living and open the doors, while her independence atrophies.

Within her domestic sphere, the woman does attain a kind of independence: the burden of salvaging a less than ideal marriage rests on

her alone. She is to expect nothing of the man, as she takes total responsibility for restoring the marriage. Such a game and charitable attitudes on the part of either marital partner may produce good results, but Mrs. Andelin insures a guilt-producing element when she insists, "If a man does not love his wife with his heart and soul, it is the wife's fault."

Indeed, a pronounced attitude of female self-depreciation appears throughout the Andelin book. While men are born leaders, decisive and possess the courage of their convictions, "women . . . tend to vacillate, and lack the qualities of good leadership." Mrs. Andelin holds working wives responsible for "violence in the streets and on the campus, drug abuse, and rebellion against social customs," and confesses, "the things we women admire in each other are rarely attractive to men. . . . Women, especially, are inclined to be selfish."

Such self-hatred is matched by the Fascinating Woman's underlying contempt for men. The saccharine role-playing of these women actually seems to candy-coat hidden hostility toward the male sex. The paramount fact about men is how different they are from women, "so different in nature and temperament that it is almost as though they came from another planet." Mrs. Andelin declares that "*to be loved is more important to a woman and to be admired is more important to a man.*" But in Andelin's characterization man's need for admiration reflects in his fragile male ego and easily injured pride, especially in the face of a competent woman. And does she not show some contempt in saying, "He has a right to be himself, to be weak, lazy, to neglect his duty or even to fail."

All in all, if the vogue enjoyed by *Fascinating Womanhood* indicates the way women view their marriages, it is a sad commentary. But perhaps *Fascinating Womanhood* has more appeal to a generation of older wives than to young wives. If so, one can take heart for the future and the feasibility of matrimony.