

June 9 Woman Identified, 2019, Rev. Linda

This spring's Christian niche-sensation movie "Unplanned," which was released at the end of March, depicts Abby Johnson, the former Planned Parenthood clinic director from Texas who became an anti-abortion activist. The movie was designed to be a rallying point for religious conservatives: its Web site includes ready-made publicity kits that can be used to organize mass ticket purchases. (Church groups are encouraged to buy out entire showtimes at theatres.) On April 1st, Vice-President Mike Pence praised the movie, tweeting, "More & more Americans are embracing the sanctity of life because of powerful stories like this one."¹

About a month after the Vice-President's tweet, the governor of Georgia, Brian Kemp, signed a law called HB 481, which will, starting in 2020, effectively prohibit abortion in the state after the sixth week of pregnancy, when doctors can sometimes detect electrical activity in the fetal cells, a signal that is sometimes referred to as a "fetal heartbeat."²

This sort of legislation is supported by the religious group Faith2Action, whose Web site currently assures readers that Justice Brett Kavanaugh's presence on the Supreme Court bodes well for so-called heartbeat bills to be upheld at the federal level. Bills similar to Georgia's have been passed, and in most cases challenged, in Iowa, North Dakota, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Ohio. In Ohio, an eleven-

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-messiness-of-reproduction-and-the-dishonesty-of-anti-abortion-propaganda>

² Ibid.

year-old who is carrying her rapist's child is no longer eligible for an abortion, according to the letter of the new law. Similar bills are on the table in South Carolina and Tennessee.³

Liberal women have protested the news from Georgia and elsewhere with panic, horror, rage, and sorrow. At six weeks, which is just two weeks after a missed period *if you have a regular menstrual cycle*, it's common to have no idea that you're pregnant. The fetus in the sixth week of pregnancy, which is roughly four weeks after fertilization, is the size of a pomegranate seed. Women have doubtlessly miscarried around 6-8 weeks without ever knowing it. Nonetheless, Georgia's law recognizes the fetus, from that point onward, as a "class of living, distinct person," to be afforded "full legal recognition."⁴

People who seek abortions after six weeks could be prosecuted; people who miscarry, even at 8 weeks, could be investigated for attempting to commit second-degree murder.

Sally Rooney in the *London Review of Books* writes, "If the fetus is a person, it is a person with a vastly expanded set of legal rights, rights available to no other class of citizen: the fetus may make free, non-consensual use of another living person's uterus and blood supply, and cause permanent, unwanted changes to another person's body. In the relationship between fetus and woman, the woman is granted fewer rights than a corpse."⁵

And how will Georgia deal with a pea sized citizen within the womb of an undocumented person? Are the heart beats of born children as sacred as unborn children?

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n10/sally-rooney/an-irish-problem>

On Christmas Eve, an 8-year-old Guatemalan boy who suffered a cough, vomiting and fever died in U.S. custody at a New Mexico hospital. The boy, identified by Guatemalan officials as Felipe Gomez Alonzo, was the second child in three weeks to die while being detained near the U.S.-Mexico border by U.S. authorities.

Jakelin Caal, 7, also Guatemalan, died Dec. 8. at an El Paso children's hospital after being detained with her father and while preparing to travel by bus to a Border Patrol station in New Mexico.

Felipe, along with his father, had been detained for a week after trying to cross the border illegally near El Paso on Dec. 18. Because of "capacity levels" in El Paso, they were moved to the Border Patrol station at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The next day, Felipe was sent to a hospital after a border agent noticed Felipe was coughing and had "glossy eyes."⁶

After being diagnosed with a cold and a fever, Felipe was prescribed amoxicillin and Ibuprofen. The Customs and Border Protection said he was held 90 minutes for observation and released Monday afternoon. That evening, he was sent back to the hospital with nausea and vomiting and died hours later.

Jakelin died two days after a grueling trip through the desert with her father along with 161 other migrants who had crossed the New Mexico border illegally. They were initially taken to a base in rural New Mexico that did not have running water, according to Democrats who visited it after the girl's death.⁷

Jakelin and her father were scheduled to travel by bus to a Border Patrol station in New Mexico when her father, Nery Gilberto

⁶ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/12/27/us-mexico-border-deaths-guatemalan-boy-girl-deaths-rare-occurrence/2420568002/>

⁷ Ibid.

Caal, told Border Patrol agents she was sick. She was taken to a children's hospital in El Paso where she died.⁸

There are currently over 15,000 children in U.S. detention camps.

We are hearing reports of abuse, assault, hunger, cold, thirst. I read in the Washington post recently that the Trump administration has cancelled soccer, English classes and legal counsel to these children and youth, flouting laws that demand education and care of minors in US custody.⁹

Do their heartbeats not count?

“I’m honored to lead a state with so many people committed to standing up for those without a voice, and commend the Legislature for getting the [fetal heartbeat] bill to my desk,” Governor Mike Parson said when lawmakers passed the abortion bill.¹⁰

His stance on protecting the unheard voices and needs of children crossing the border without documents, does not include language about standing up for them.

A ban on abortion means that more women of color without adequate resources will be having babies because they are not able to afford traveling across state lines to have abortions they do not have the money to pay for. Will health care support the well being of these children? Will their schools provide lunches, counseling, attentive nurturing? Will mental health clinics care for their emotional and psychological needs?

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/trump-administration-cancels-english-classes-soccer-legal-aid-for-unaccompanied-child-migrants-in-us-shelters/2019/06/05/df2a0008-8712-11e9-a491-25df61c78dc4_story.html?utm_term=.bcf3c9a4f096

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/24/us/missouri-abortion-law.html>

Rev. Rob Schenck is an evangelical minister. He recently wrote an article for the New York Times called, “I Was an Anti-Abortion Crusader. Now I Support Roe v. Wade.”

He writes, “Over the last decade, I have changed my view on Roe. I’ve come to believe that overturning Roe would not be “pro-life”; rather, it would be destructive of life. I have witnessed firsthand and now appreciate the full significance of the terrible poverty, social marginalization and baldfaced racism that persists in many of the states whose legislators are now essentially banning abortion.

“If Roe is overturned, middle- and upper-class white women will still secure access to abortions by traveling to states where abortion is not banned, but members of minorities and poor whites will too often find themselves forced to bear children for whom they cannot [and we as a nation do not] adequately care.

“And surely the last thing we need is another way to fill the nation’s prisons with people [who live in] poverty and the lives of the marginalized — especially since, punitive laws are disproportionately enforced against low-income people and people of color.”¹¹

Women in states will face 99 years in prison if found having an abortion.

Nearly nine in 10 unwanted pregnancies happen in relationships, and most abortion patients say their male partners support their decision.¹² One would think that the male partner who supports the decision of abortion would also be subject to this law.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/opinion/abortion-laws-men.html>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/opinion/abortion-laws-men.html>

We are so comfortable with regulating women's sexual behavior and desire, but we're shocked by the idea of doing it to men. Though it might seem strange to talk about men and abortion, it's stranger not to, since women don't have unwanted pregnancies without them.¹³

Why is the partner, who offers the needed components to fertilize the egg, exempt from this punishment? Imagine if that were at stake? Our religious traditions have tacitly approved as natural, for millennia, men who sex have for pleasure. Woman's desire is only religiously sanctioned when it leads to childbirth.

Desire must have an outcome and a cost for women, and no matter the joy of many births, a painful cost at the very least. Women must be punished for desire that does not lead to a life of caretaking, nurturing, providing, increasing progeny. Female desire without regulation, without codification, without consequence is frightening. Where might it lead?

According to Rush Limbaugh, "Militant feminists are pro-choice because it's their ultimate avenue of power over men. It is their attempt to impose their will on the rest of society, particularly on men."

I have been present at many abortions. I have never noted that the women involved were happy, or angry at men, or seeking dominion over another. I have noticed suffering, a heart wrenching choice, the aching of the aftermath, the rocking back and forth, the deep sorrow. I have never met a woman who had an abortion as an act of vengeance.

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/opinion/abortion-laws-men.html>

Is this about protecting the fetuses we deem worthy of saving or regulating women's bodies and desire? Rather than arguing that women will die from illegal abortions, which happens less and less now even in countries where abortion is illegal, what if the pro-choice movement argues that consensual sex for pleasure is good, right, moral and necessary to produce well rounded human beings?

So what happens if Roe v. Wade falls?

Abortion won't disappear. Research shows that countries where abortion is illegal have higher rates of abortion than in the United States. Nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended, of which four in 10 end in abortion.¹⁴

As we have learned, women of color, particularly with few resources, will be inordinately punished. There will be more unwanted children in this world, without access to the services needed to have a healthy life, because those programs are being cut.

Is this about heartbeats? If it were, we would be legislating more humane treatment of children in our country?

The United States has a higher infant mortality rate than 32 other countries out of 35. Ranking only above Chile, Turkey and Mexico.

From 646-1811 there were approximately 40-50,00 people murdered after accused of being witches, 78% of whom were women. Death occurred through torture, drowning, and burning. These were women, many of whom were healers, who offered other women ways to reduce their pain and, in some cases, abort unwanted pregnancies. These women lived unsanctioned lives.

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/opinion/abortion-laws-men.html>

In this country, the Puritans believed that women were inherently sinful and more susceptible to damnation than men were. Puritans held the belief that men and women were equal in the eyes of God, but not in the eyes of the Devil. Women's souls were seen as unprotected in their vulnerable bodies, one might say in their bodies that were thought not to have full control of their own desire and needed men to monitor and take charge of to stay out of the reaches of the devil. Women who did not conform to the norms of Puritan society were more likely to be the target of an accusation, especially those who were unmarried or did not have children.¹⁵

I read an article by Gretchen Adams, who documented of the treatment of witches, called hysteria by many. This history in some political and literary circles is being used as a vivid cautionary tale about the dangers of isolationism, religious extremism, false accusations, and lapses in due process.¹⁶

Much is at stake, including the very lives of our women and children.

May we be vigilant, remembering that the heartbeat of a fetus the size of a pomegranate seed that cannot live without its host, be treated with not more respect than the body upon which it depends.

May we learn to celebrate all sexuality and expression as part of healthy, human cycle of wellbeing, and may we not be cowed by the voices that call pro-choice advocates immoral, those who also advocate for human laws for the rights of children, orphans and all people.

Our voices must continue to cry out in the wilderness. Women's rights are human rights. Women's rights are human rights. Amen.

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem_witch_trials#CITEREFAdams2009

¹⁶ Gretchen Adams, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009), [The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America.](#)