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**Opinion: Just barely free**

[By STEPHANIE RUTT](https://www.concordmonitor.com/byline?byline=By%20STEPHANIE%20RUTT)

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As I watched the reactions to the Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade, I noticed a small group of young women huddled together, gleefully celebrating. And my heart broke. I wrote this thinking of them.

“Please forgive this grandmother’s offering to you, but I can’t in good conscience remain silent. Why? Because I can remember what you cannot and I fear you’re celebrating at your peril. As a teenager, I knew girls, only a little younger than you, who became pregnant and had to sneak away to strange, often dingy, back bedrooms for abortions because telling their parents simply wasn’t an option. Sometimes, the fathers cared deeply and would go along. Sometimes not. But what was clear was that the pregnancy was solely on the girl. Mostly, I remember being so afraid for them, hoping they’d be okay and that the worst wouldn’t happen. These were the years just before *Roe v. Wade* became law.

Still, even as women were soon discovering and enjoying a new autonomy over their sexuality and reproductive rights with the adoption of Roe and the availability of the pill, there remained a clear resistance to such freedoms, particularly from the more fundamentalist Christian communities where there was strong patriarchy. This resistance is now on full display across our country.

Think about the recent Texas ruling on abortion which many states are now duplicating. Suppose truly protecting the welfare of the unborn child were the issue, and life begins at conception as Christians strongly believe. Why did the ruling not also require expectant fathers to immediately begin paying child support with the confirmation of a positive pregnancy test? And why weren’t similar vigilante groups legalized to aid in the reporting of any noticed financial delinquencies or, worse, to report any fathers trying to skirt their responsibility? Would not this also have been in the unborn child's best interest? But, no. No such accountability for the man, now a father, was legislated.

And over the years, I’ve noticed that the most extreme example of this double standard can happen when there’s sexual abuse occurring within the family. I pray you’ll never be one of those moms (yes, you never imagine it could be you) who discovers that your husband is visiting your daughter’s bed at night and naturally believes that your clergy leader will help and support you. Sadly, it’s not entirely uncommon to find that it is you who are blamed because, of course, the natural solution would be for you to be a better wife.

As very restrictive anti-abortion laws now go into effect around the country, and many don’t allow for exceptions for incest or rape, my dear young women, please pause and consider what will happen to that thirteen-year-old now pregnant with her biological father’s child? She could be your younger sister. And where would you go if, God forbid, you were brutally raped and found yourself pregnant?

Oh, my dear young, beautiful, alive, gleeful women. When a secular democratic society morphs into a theocracy based on one particular religious tradition, or in our case just one part of a tradition, the fundamentalist wing of the Christian faith, a blurring of church and state occurs. And men tend to win as women lose. And this is exactly what’s happening.

Think I’m being an alarmist? Christian fundamentalists have been laying the foundations for this morphing for quite a while now but, fortunately, other God-loving Christians have joined the fight to push back. I urge you to check out former President Jimmy Carter’s article, “Losing My Religion for Equality.” He talks about severing his six-decade ties with the Southern Baptist Convention after the Convention declared women to be subservient to their husbands and stressed its opposition to women as pastors.

It makes me truly frightened for you to imagine what could be next as Christian fundamentalism, intent on no less than patriarchic theocratic rule, sweeps the country now emboldened by a Supreme Court majority. For example, could women soon be, subtly yet persistently, discouraged or even forbidden from pursuing other leadership roles in our society? If the goal is to largely silence a woman’s voice and curtail her full participation, then is it not a too-far cry to imagine a future time when even a woman’s right to vote could be brought into question?

After all, in such an environment, would she ever dare to have a difference of opinion from her husband or other male figures, and actually make it known? Would she not naturally look to them for guidance on the right thought and action? Would not the male voice, and vote, then naturally speak for her, for all women?

Have you read *The Handmaid’s Tale*? If not, oh my dears, do it now! Wake up before it’s too late! Wake up beautiful, young, gleeful women while you are still, just barely, free.”

*Rev. Dr. Stephanie Rutt is founding minister of the Tree of Life Interfaith Temple in Amherst. She lives in Nashua. To read more of her writing visit becomeaforceforgood.com.*