

## The Wired Word

Student Handout

# Nominated to Supreme Court

Sunday, October 4, 2020 --- from 9:00-9:45am

Hybrid Class

In Person: First Floor Social Hall (*Mask & Social Distancing Required*)

or

Zoom: Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220 Passcode: 195152

Dear Class Member,

The nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court has caused some people to hope that she will express her Catholic faith as a justice, and some to fear the very same thing. Because of widespread focus on her religious beliefs, expressing faith in the workplace will be the topic of our next class.

During this time of social distancing to control the spread of the virus, *The Wired Word* is including in the TWW student version the full lesson, with all the biblical commentary and additional discussion suggestions normally available only in the teacher's version.

### How To Participate:

We are offering The Wired Word as a hybrid class. You can participate in person or via Zoom. The Wired Word will be from 9:00am-9:45am on Sunday mornings. For those meeting in person, we will be in the old social hall of the church building (located on the first floor). If participating in person, please come with a mask and follow the COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Sunday School: <http://www.sprucc.org/news-a-events/news.html#COVID19Precautions>.

You can also participate in the Wired Word virtually by Zoom on your computer or smart device at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86089807220?pwd=eStWa0ZZK0hOTVdwU0pjZlMrdk5ydz09>

or by telephone by calling: 1-301-715-8592 US (Germantown, PA)

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220

Passcode: 195152

#### **Please Note, due to building renovations:**

The Sunday, October 11 Wired Word Class will be by Zoom ONLY (No In-Person)

The Sunday, October 18 Wired Word Class is CANCELLED

The Sunday, October 25 Wired Word Class will be Hybrid (In-person and Zoom)

To subscribe or unsubscribe to the weekly mailing of The Wired Word student handout, please contact the church office at [Office@sprucc.org](mailto:Office@sprucc.org).



## Amy Coney Barrett, Catholic and Originalist, Nominated to Supreme Court

*The Wired Word* for the Week of October 4, 2020

### In the News

Amy Coney Barrett has been chosen by President Donald Trump to replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Supreme Court. A committed Roman Catholic, Barrett interprets the Constitution through an approach known as originalism, which favors the original understanding of the authors of the Constitution. Her originalism is favored by many on the right, while others on the right hope that she will rule according to her Catholic faith. This possibility is feared by many on the left who predict that she will vote in favor of modifying or reversing some laws, including the Roe v. Wade decision that created a constitutional right to abortion.

A federal court appellate judge from South Bend, Indiana, Barrett was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Trump in a Rose Garden press conference on Saturday, September 26. "I will be mindful of who came before me," Barrett said, paying homage to Ginsburg in a statement reported by the *Associated Press*. "She not only broke glass ceilings; she smashed them."

But in the same statement, she highlighted that her approach to the law was the opposite of the approach taken by Ginsburg. Speaking of Ginsburg's colleague and friend Antonin Scalia, Barrett said, "His judicial philosophy is mine, too." Justice Scalia was one of the most forceful advocates for originalism, while Justice Ginsburg believed that constitutional law can and should evolve in response to changing circumstances and values.

If Barrett is confirmed by the Senate, conservatives will gain a majority on the Supreme Court that could last for many years. Six of the nine justices will be Catholic. One of the issues that will surely come before the court again is abortion, the legality of which has been hotly contested for almost 50 years, even though *Roe v. Wade* established a legal precedent. Barrett has not said publicly if she would seek to scale back abortion rights, but some people have raised questions about Barrett's involvement in conservative organizations.

In 2002, Barrett moved to South Bend to begin her academic career at Notre Dame. She also connected with People of Praise, a charismatic Christian group. According to *Politico*, "People of Praise is one of a number of groups that rose up in the 1960s and '70s to offer intense, highly supportive religious communities, in the style of evangelical churches, within the Catholic tradition." People of Praise is open to all charismatic Christians who confess the Nicene Creed. Although the majority of members are Roman Catholic, it has been criticized by some Catholics for being too ecumenical. Its main efforts have been the funding of several schools, work in impoverished inner-city areas, and hosting marriage-support seminars.

How Barrett's religious beliefs might influence her legal views became a focus for some Democrats during her 2017 confirmation hearings for her nomination to become a judge in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit. This focus prompted Republicans to accuse Democrats of imposing a religious test on Barrett's fitness for the position. According to *Fox News*, the White House is now mounting an "offensive" communications strategy ahead of Barrett's upcoming Senate confirmation fight, with aides describing an aggressive plan for "knife fighters" to "fiercely" defend the nominee.

Barrett and her husband, Jesse Barrett, a former federal prosecutor, have seven children, including two adopted from Haiti and one with special needs. Their five oldest children attended Trinity School, founded in 1981 by People of Praise. The school articulates a conservative Christian set of values, including a statement that says, "We understand marriage to be a legal and committed relationship between a man and a woman and believe that the only proper place for sexual activity is within these bounds of conjugal love." At the same time, the school rejects any form of bullying, verbal abuse or intimidation for any reason, including a "student's sex, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or perceived sexuality." Amy Coney Barrett served as a Trinity School board member from 2015-2017.

Before becoming a judge, Barrett discussed how stability in the law is provided by court precedents. But she left open the possibility of reversing some precedents. "Once a precedent is deeply rooted," said a law journal article that she co-wrote, "the Court is no longer required to deal with the question of the precedent's correctness." But it went on to say, "None of this is to say that a Justice cannot attempt to overturn long-established precedent."

Early in her career, she often included God in articles and speeches, and in a 2006 address she urged graduating law students to see their careers as part of "building the kingdom of God." Before being nominated to the appeals courts in 2017, she received payments from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a conservative Christian law firm. *The Washington Post* reports that she was a paid speaker five times at the Blackstone Legal Fellowship, an ADF summer program established to promote a "distinctly Christian legal worldview in every area of law." It was created to show students "how God can use them as judges, law professors and practicing attorneys to help keep the door open for the spread of the Gospel in America."

In 2015, Barrett co-signed a letter to Catholic bishops that affirmed that marriage is the "indissoluble commitment of a man and a woman." In a 1998 article about Catholic judges in capital cases, she referred to abortion as "always immoral." But she has said that these views would not impact her work as a judge. "It's never appropriate for a judge to impose that judge's personal convictions -- whether they derive from faith or anywhere else -- on the law," she said during her 2017 confirmation hearing.

Although she is a Catholic and an originalist, her limited judicial record makes it hard to predict how she might rule on any particular case. Historically, some justices who seemed to be conservative ended up ruling in ways that turned out to be much more moderate. Barrett said in 2019, "I think the public should be absolutely concerned about whether a nominee for judicial office will be willing and able to set aside personal preferences,

be they moral, be they political, whatever convictions they are. The public should be concerned about whether a nominee can set those aside in favor of following the law. ... But that's not a challenge just for religious people. I mean, that's a challenge for everyone."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Amy Coney Barrett, Supreme Court Nominee, is Scalia's Heir. \*Associated Press\*](#)

[How Amy Coney Barrett's Religious Group Helped Shape a City. \*Politico\*](#)

[Amy Coney Barrett Confirmation: Inside the White House's Plan to Deploy 'Knife Fighters' to Defend Nominee. \*Fox News\*](#)

[Amy Coney Barrett, Supreme Court Nominee, Spoke at Program Founded to Inspire a 'Distinctly Christian Worldview in Every Area of Law.' \*The Washington Post\*](#)

[Amy Coney Barrett Gave a Perfect Response to Anti-Religious Bigotry. \*PJ Media\*](#)

[FAQ. \*People of Praise Christian Community\*](#)

## **Applying the News Story**

Use the scrutiny being directed toward Amy Coney Barrett as an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which you express, or do not express, your personal faith in the workplace.

## **The Big Questions**

1. How does your faith affect the decisions you make on the job, if at all?
2. When have you talked about your beliefs with coworkers, if ever? How is such conversation encouraged or discouraged in your workplace?
3. "Separation of church and state" is often discussed in American life. Is there a separation of church and work, and, if so, what is the line between the two?
4. What does it mean to you to be a Christian not only on Sunday, but Monday through Saturday?
5. Which of the biblical commandments do you try to apply at work, if any?

## **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Deuteronomy 6:1-2**

*Now this is the commandment -- the statutes and the ordinances -- that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. (For context, read 6:1-9.)*

At the beginning of Deuteronomy 6, Moses speaks of the commandment that the people are "to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy." This begins a section in which Moses reviews God's goodness and urges the people to behave like God's chosen people, fearing God and keeping all of God's commandments so that their "days may be long." If the people observe the commandments diligently, it will "go well" with them, and they will multiply greatly (v. 3).

Clearly, God desires to work for good in the lives of God's people. Decrees and commandments are given for our benefit, to structure our lives in life-giving ways. Just as the game of tennis would be meaningless without lines or a net, our lives would become chaotic without the ordering of God's laws. Commandments are meant to be helpful to us, not oppressive.

Next comes the commandment to love, introduced here for the first time. The commandment to "love the LORD your God" (v. 5) is a bold new approach, one that goes on to become central to both Judaism and Christianity. Jesus later referenced this verse as the first part of his Great Commandment. Moses continues by saying, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away" (vv. 6-7). God's law is to be remembered in every aspect of life.

**Questions:** How do God's commandments structure your day in a life-giving way, at home and at work? When do you show your love for God on the job, if ever? When do you remember God's words when you are away from home?

### **Joshua 24:15**

*Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.* (For context, read 24:14-25.)

Joshua renews the covenant with the people of Israel at Shechem, challenging them to "revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" (v. 14). He warns the people not to "forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods" (v. 20). Then he renews their relationship with God, and makes statutes and ordinances for them.

**Questions:** How do you serve God in the work you do Monday through Saturday? What "foreign gods" try to capture your attention and loyalty? What aspects of your performance on the job would signal that you "serve the LORD"?

### **Matthew 22:21**

*... Then [Jesus] said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."* (For context, read 22:15-22.)

The Pharisees try to trap Jesus by saying, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (v. 17). They know that if he says "yes," he will get in trouble with the Jewish people, but if he says "no," he will get in trouble with the Romans. But Jesus, aware of their malice, says, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." They bring him a denarius, and he says to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They say, "The emperor's." Then he says to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (vv. 18-21). Jesus knows that the denarius, which bears the image of the emperor, belongs to the emperor. But each person, who bears the image of God, belongs to God. So our response should be to give ourselves fully to God, seven days a week.

**Questions:** In what ways do you give yourself to God, even as you earn money and pay taxes? What prevents you from giving yourself fully to God in the workplace?

### **Ephesians 5:8-9**

*... Live as children of light -- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.* (No context needed.)

Located on the west coast of what is now Turkey, Ephesus was a Greek seaport city that existed for hundreds of years before being swallowed up by the Roman Empire. Under the rule of the Emperor Augustus, it grew into a prominent, prosperous and powerful city, expanding through the first century until it reached a population of more than 400,000 people. Paul took the gospel to Ephesus and later wrote his letter to the Ephesians to remind them that "by grace you have been saved through faith" (2:8).

Paul also advised them on how to conduct themselves in their city: "Live as children of light." To let God's light shine through them involved putting away falsehood, giving up stealing, stripping away "all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice," turning away from fornication and greed, as well as "obscene, silly, and vulgar talk" (4:25 -- 5:4). Paul wanted the Ephesians to remove the impurities that kept them from being able to receive and transmit the light of God. He wanted them to live "as children of light -- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true."

**Questions:** Where is refining most needed among followers of Christ in the workplace today? What behavior do you think is most pleasing to the Lord? How can you become more transparent to the light of God?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. What concerns, if any, do you have about Catholic Amy Coney Barrett joining the Supreme Court? What concerns, if any, did you have about Jewish Ruth Bader Ginsburg being on the Supreme Court? How should their faith influence their work as a justice, if at all?
2. "We are called to live our faith in our work," [writes J. David Karam](#), president of Wendy's International, Inc., "regardless of the demands of the workplace." What does this mean to you?
3. "Faith at work," [writes CEO Sandi Krakowski](#), "as I see it and hope to lead the [world](#) in, means my faith makes me a better worker. It is the outworking of everything I believe being demonstrated in my workplace. As a person who exercises her faith at work, it should make me the best worker anyone ever encounters. I should be more faithful, more patient, more honest and the one who shines the most. ... True faith ... is not focused on being perfect or better than another person. It means I am seeking to be a better person, more empowered and rising above what I could ever be on my own. It doesn't mean I am more perfect or that perfection is my goal. Simply put, it means I am dependent on One greater than myself to help me with my work and my life." Discuss.
4. When have you experienced inappropriate expressions of personal faith at work? How did these experiences affect you or your coworkers? What did you learn from these incidents?
5. As you think about whether a Supreme Court justice should be influenced by her or his faith, does it matter to you what the faith of that justice is? Why or why not? How would you feel about a justice being a committed Hindu or Muslim, as opposed to a committed Catholic? How would you feel about a justice being a progressive Christian while you are a conservative Christian -- or vice versa?

### **Responding to the News**

Take some time to reflect on how you can give yourself more fully to God, both at work and at home. Identify a core religious conviction that you can include in your job in an appropriate way.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, you are the Lord of every dimension of life. May our work reflect your will and your way, every day of the week. In Jesus' name. Amen.