



## *A Black Defense of Freedom of Conscience and Amy Coney Barrett*

Fellow Americans,

Every individual has the right to follow their conscience, a right that is a founding principle of this nation, protected by the First Amendment. As bishops, pastors, other clergy and intellectuals from the various Pentecostal-Charismatic and Full Gospel denominations we write to appeal to the sense of justice of every American, and to the American tradition of individual freedom. Our society benefits in immeasurable ways from service of people of faith, Republican and Democrat, in particular as they care for the needy. The right to serve through a variety of avenues, especially through public service, must never be hindered by discrimination on the basis of religious belief.

As Christians, when we see others being abused and mistreated, we must speak out in defense of their rights. We must defend the rights of our fellow Christians, of people of other faiths and of those who hold no faith. Today we stand with, and speak in defense of, Judge Amy Coney Barrett. As black Christians we will not stand by in silence as our sister in the faith is persecuted for the “political crime” of her beliefs.

We do not know whether she will be nominated for a seat on the Supreme Court of the United States, for which she is by all reports under consideration. But we do know that attacks on her

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Christian beliefs and her membership in a charismatic Christian community reflect rank religious bigotry that has no legitimate place in our political debates or public life. We condemn these vile attacks—which began three years ago during the process of her confirmation for the judicial post she currently holds. As the descendants of slaves we are particularly sensitive to acts of discrimination and we demand an end to this reprehensible conduct.

Judge Barrett has a record as a lawyer, law professor, and U.S. Court of Appeals judge. She should be judged on that record, not on her religious beliefs or membership in a religious community, be it charismatic or otherwise. Contrary to the claims of some, this is no marginal group. Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians together represent almost 600 million people, or 8.5 % of the world's population and almost twice the population of the United States. If Judge Barrett's belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and in the moral convictions associated with the historic Christian faith disqualifies her for an office of public trust, then our American values of individual freedom and the right to follow one's conscience are simply hypocrisy. The truth, however, is that the Constitution of the United States itself prohibits religious tests for public office. Those who say that Judge Barrett's charismatic Christian faith—or ours—is a threat to the Constitution are themselves enemies of the Constitution. They are enemies of the freedom of the individual. Such behavior cannot be tolerated. We must stand in defense of freedom of conscience in principle and defend Judge Barrett's right to practice her faith in particular.

If Judge Barrett is indeed nominated to fill the current vacancy on the Supreme Court, we look forward to examining her record. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with her to discuss key issues of federal constitutional and statutory law, especially those that are most critical to the communities we are called by Jesus to serve, including the poor, the incarcerated, the immigrant, and the marginalized. We are eager to discuss questions of racial justice; affirmative action; voting rights; the sanctity of human life in all stages and conditions; marriage and the family; and religious freedom.

We trust that all Americans, on the right and on the left, will accord Judge Barrett fair treatment, evaluating her judicial record and not discriminating against her religious beliefs. This is what individual freedom, freedom of conscience, demands.

In His Service,

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