



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
**Faith & Action Project**

***The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement  
is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear***  
by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II

Discussion Guide  
by Rev. Dr. Amy Lindeman Allen

## WELCOME

Thank you for participating in the 2022 Faith & Action Project Fall Event book discussion!

The Christian Theological Seminary Faith & Action Project is dedicated to helping to spark a revolution of hope by bringing together faith communities, nonprofit organizations, and leaders in business and government in a collaborative effort to turn back the tide of poverty.

It does this through three complementary components:

1. The **Faith & Action Fall Event** allows the community to listen in as national experts discuss the big issues, helping to frame the challenges we face and inspire big ideas.
2. The **Faith & Action Grant Program** makes resources available to accelerate initiatives and collaborations that have shown to be effective in breaking the cycle of poverty in Central Indiana.
3. The **Faith & Action Spring Conference** highlights local initiatives that are making a difference, shares best practices, and promotes networking and collaboration among organizations fighting poverty.



Launched in 2016, the Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary is supported from the Mike and Sue Smith Family Fund and Lumina Foundation.

In this discussion guide you will find:

- A letter from CTS faculty member and author of the resource guide, Rev. Dr. Amy Lindeman Allen
- Tips for the discussion facilitator
- A set of questions to guide conversation

Thanks for participating and enjoy your discussion!

QUESTIONS? NEED TO BOUNCE AROUND IDEAS?

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

**William J. Barber II, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2016.**

### **A Note Before Reading / Discussing**

Throughout both this book and his larger ministry and activism, the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber promotes ***fusion coalitions***. Fusion politics is a national phenomenon in which the leaders of (sometimes drastically) different political parties work together for a common cause.

Such cooperation doesn't represent a merger or concession on beliefs, but rather serves as a political expedient towards a common end. During the American Reconstruction Era, following the Civil War, the infusion of so many Black voters in the South led fusion politics to surface across party lines in different ways across the Southern states, sometimes resulting in support of a candidate from one party at a national level and another party at the state level. The center of many such coalitions was securing and preserving voting rights.

Almost one hundred years later, the American Civil Rights Movement, which Barber (following others), describes as America's second reconstruction, also employed fusion politics. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. also put voting rights at the center of his campaign, promoting not just political expediency, but a moral center grounded in antiracist, pro-justice commitments.

As the Rev. Dr. William Barber reimagines fusion coalitions in the present era, which he describes as America's third Reconstruction, the backbone of the fusion coalitions he has formed is what he calls the ***moral center***. In the footsteps of King, Barber has formed his movement around shared justice commitments that cross political, geographical, racial, and religious boundaries. A shared ideal of what is *right* and *good* in the world.

As we reflect upon this book and, through it, the Rev. Dr. Barber's life and movement, I would encourage participants to hold close to their best construction of this fusion ideal. Chances are great that, like those who have come to participate in the Poor People's Campaign, those participating in this discussion group come from diverse backgrounds with different levels of real and perceived social power. This need not create barriers to conversation; it can be an opportunity to learn and grow.

We do not have to always (or even mostly) agree with the Rev. Dr. Barber or one another to respect one another. We do not have to agree with one another to learn from each other. The expectation is not that we leave these discussions of one mind, but rather that we go from these conversations into our own lives and ministries with deepened understanding.

As such, I suggest a few ground rules for discussion:<sup>1</sup>

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views.
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating. Comment in order to share information, not persuade.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Allow everyone the chance to speak. Depending upon the size of the group, after your last comment, you may consider allowing two other individuals to speak before commenting again.
- Avoid assumptions about any member of the group or generalizations about social groups. Do not ask individuals to speak for their (perceived) social group.

By engaging in respectful conversation together, we can deepen not only our relationships with one another, but with our respective communities. I look forward to learning and growing with you.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Dr. Amy Lindeman Allen  
Assistant Professor of New Testament  
Christian Theological Seminary

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<sup>1</sup> These are taken from University of Michigan, "Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or High Stakes Topics," <https://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/generalguidelines>

## FACILATOR TIPS

1. Find a location that will be comfortable and conducive to discussion. Try to have enough space for the anticipated group for people to sit in a circle, or at least facing each other as much as possible. Arrive enough ahead of time to rearrange chairs as needed.
2. Attempt to assemble a group of individuals with diverse world views and lived experiences to help enrich the discussion. About 12-15 people is optimal for a book discussion.
3. Facilitators should seek to create safety for people to be candid and vulnerable in sharing their subjective perspectives by not assigning judgment.
4. Facilitators should understand what your goals for the discussion are and commit to using the guidelines in this discussion guide. Although we recommend using the questions presented here, they may want to add some of their own.
5. Be prepared with an icebreaker. A lighthearted question such as, “What did you find most compelling about the book?” might help get the conversation started.
6. Begin by asking participants to introduce themselves. Have paper handy so that participants can make name tents.
7. Allow opportunities for all to contribute to the discussion and encourage participants to actively listen to others and not dominate the conversation.
8. Your role is to foster discussion and include everyone who wants to participate. Unless asked to facilitate as an “expert,” don’t let your personal views influence how you handle the discussion. If something is said that seems untrue or upsetting, you can ask the group, “What do others think about that?”
9. Anticipate some level of uncomfortableness among group participants given the sensitive nature of the film's subject matter.
10. Keep the discussion on track. Many people will naturally want to relate the book experience to their own lives. This can enrich the discussion, but if it goes on too long, you may need to say, “Let’s return to the book” or ask a new question that is directly about the book.
15. Don’t worry if there is silence: a silence of three or four seconds may feel like a long time, but the break may elicit thoughtful comments.
16. Choose a way to end the discussion. If you’ve set a stopping time and it’s getting close, you may mention there are only \_\_ minutes left and find out if anyone has any burning issues that weren’t addressed. If the conversation has lulled, or if it seems most people are “done” with the exception of a few, you can help end the official discussion by saying, “Well, thank you all

for coming—it was a great discussion,” and standing up. Those who want to will exit, and those who want to chat informally will still be able to do so as they go.

These guidelines were adapted from UW-Madison's Go Big Read Program, Madison Public Library, and CCBC Book Discussion Guidelines (by Ginny Moore Kruse and Kathleen T. Horning).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Prologue: *Go Home*

1. Reflect on the unnamed mother's wisdom: "Even though my feet were tired, my soul was rested." To what kind of rest does this mother refer? Have you known this sort of peace? If so, what brought it about?
2. Barber reflects upon the inspiration of public gathering and the pull to return home. How does this relate to your own public and private personas? How do you take the work for which you advocate, whether at protest gatherings, on social media, or otherwise "home" for the long haul? How do King and Barber model this for us?

Note: As we reflect on this book together, there will be plenty of opportunities to "gather publicly"—to support the work of people like King, Barber, and so many others who have worked for and in many cases brought about change on the local and national stages. At the same time, however, I encourage you, as you read these pages, to continue to *go home*—to reflect upon if and how this inspirational story may motivate and change *you* and how you act and live in the communities to which you belong.

### Chapter 1: *Son of a Preacher Man*

1. Barber describes the faith that he holds most deeply coming from his grandmother; she and other ladies would bring aid to people in need, saying, "We've got to go and hope somebody." From where does your hope come? How do you "hope" others?
2. Appearances can be deceiving. Both implicit and explicit bias contribute to this. Barber describes his father as a man with a "quick, versatile mind" who looked like a "farmhand" to the neighbors. Barber's own early presence at community meetings was questioned because he was a child. Have you ever been judged by or judged another too quickly based upon outward appearance? Brainstorm better ways to come to know a person. Reflect on this in light of the *imago dei* (Gen 1:27).
3. Barber takes the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as inspiration for much of his work. Prior to reading this book, what did you know about Dr. King and his ministry of activism? What did you know about the "agony," "struggle," and "nightmare" that Barber describes? In your view, do the MLK monument and holiday continue Dr. King's work or hinder it? What is at the core of your understanding of what King stood for? What is necessary to move this forward?
4. Biblical and religious language are interwoven in Barber's rhetoric. Citing Micah 6:8, he finds his strength in the conviction that God is and has always been about the common good. What embedded theologies are implicit in this statement? Do you agree or disagree?
5. At the height of the neoconservative movement of the 1980's, Barber defines himself as a religious conservative. How does he use the term "conservative" in each of these contexts? How do you understand this word in your context? Do you think it applies?

What do you see as the benefits and/or dangers of using biblical language to justify political commitments?

6. What did King's critics mean when they criticized him for not "acting like a preacher"? In your view, how can/should a preacher act? What is at stake? It might be helpful to consider some of the preachers interviewed in Dr. Francis' books on *Faith and Ferguson*.

## **Chapter 2: My First Fight**

1. Reflecting upon his first parish, Barber notes the "fault lines that ran deep beneath the picturesque veneer of this small Sothern town." What are the fault lines that run beneath your community? How did you discover them? Do you actively engage or ignore them? Why?
2. Have you ever experienced a "paralysis of analysis" related to social or political problems? Were you able to overcome this? How does Barber overcome his own potential to paralysis? How does he respond to the common equivocation, "There are good people on both sides"? How can one remember and respect the *imago dei* in all people while striving towards the common good?
3. The fear of (or inevitability of) failure can be demoralizing. Barber cites Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan's single voice of dissent to the *Plessy v Ferguson* case noting, "Justice Harland lost by a landslide in 1896. But he won history." Paul talks about the shared work of ministry: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3:6; cf. Jn 4:35-38). What seeds are you called to water that others have planted? What seeds are you being called to plant, even if they remain for others to harvest?
4. Barber makes a distinction between realism that shapes goals and realism that shapes strategies. What is the difference as you understand it? Why does it matter?
5. Citing Frederick Douglas' wide coalition of allies in the abolition struggle, Barber reflects: "Douglas knew what I was now learning: in the struggle for justice, we always need all the friends we can get." This may sound simplistic, but Barber recognizes that it is not. What are the challenges of holding together such a wide coalition? What are the advantages? Does it make a difference if one thinks about these partners as "friends" in addition to "allies"?
6. What fight(s) are you unable to run away from today? What would it take to win them?

## **Chapter 3: Learning to Stand Together**

1. Barber talks about his professional role shifting, but the cry for justice remaining the same. Vocation is more than a position or occupation. What does vocation mean for you? What is your vocational call?
2. Barber's medical diagnosis led to a dark moment in his life. What helped to get him through? Reflect on your own experiences of pain, despair, or dependency. What helped/helps to get you through?
3. Disability presents another opportunity to notice how biases can distract from the reality of a person. He recalls going places on his walker and the audience wondering, "When is the speaker coming?" How does Barber navigate this? Are there ways in which



Barber living into his body in this moment of his life became for him not a disability, but a part of his *ability* to reach people? How does your embodied-self impact the way you are in the world? The way that you show up for and reach others in need?

4. In our American culture so rooted in independence, Barber's experience of disability helps him to embrace *interdependence*. He recalls responding to those who doubted his ability to accomplish the work, "I know I can't do it. But we can build a community to do this. I don't need to do it if we can get together." What work in your life requires you to acknowledge your inability to accomplish it alone? What blessings come from working together?
5. Barber cites Jesus' inaugural sermon in Luke's gospel as a mission statement: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). What does "good news to the poor" look like for Barber in his context? What might it look like in your community? How do we know?
6. This inaugural sermon was given in a synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus as a Jewish teacher, probably aligned with the Pharisees, was speaking to other Jews across religious and political affiliations. Barber notes that the traditional political parties weren't the ones who were able to effect change, but rather the "church itself was called to be a liberation movement." Barber here understands "church" akin to the old children's rhyme: "The church is not a building; the church is not a steeple...the church is the people." In the Jewish religious and political realities of the day, it'd probably be more accurate to say that it was the religious people (Pharisees, Sadducees, followers of Jesus) who were called towards this liberation. With this historical context, how does Jesus' address, and the context in which he offers it, embody fusion politics? What might we have to learn from Jesus' model?

#### **Chapter 4: From Banquets to Battle**

1. After years of work together with the Greenleaf community, Barber expresses joy and gratitude at seeing "good news come to life in the neighborhood where you live and work." What would good news coming to life in your neighborhood look like? What would it take to get there? What first step could you take this week?
2. Barber describes his "raggedy old cane" as his "testimony." To what does his cane testify? What is your testimony? How do you embody this for others?
3. Before reading this book, how would you have described the roots of the Civil Rights Movement? Barber traces the work of the Civil Rights Movement back to WEB Dubois, the work of the NAACP as early as 1908, and others. Why is it important to remember these early beginnings? How does this connect to the biblical message of sowing, watering, and reaping?
4. Drawing on the example of the prophet Amos, Barber warns of twin dangers "when we are at ease in Zion": (1) "to accommodate ourselves to an 'acceptable amount of injustice" and (2) "to not stand up against those forces that inevitably rise up to say, 'We must go back to Egypt, where we lived as slaves'". How did these dangers manifest

themselves for Barber? How have they manifested themselves for you? Reflect upon how a prophetic orientation can help to resist such dangers.

5. At the first People's Assembly, people came together to listen and share their stories. What did they learn through this sharing? Did anything change?
6. This entire book is a telling of Barber's story; his struggle. If you were to tell *your* story of engagement with the struggle for a common good, what would you title it? What chapters have already been written? What next chapters would you like to see?

### **Chapter 5: *Resistance is Your Confirmation***

1. Reflect on the description of nonviolent struggle attributed to Gandhi: "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." How does this fit with Barber's experience. What stage best describes the Poor People's Campaign today?
2. Prior to reading this book, what did you know about the history of reconstruction in America? How does knowing that "More blacks were elected to public office during the period of 1868 to 1880 than at any other time in American history" speak to your previous understandings of American history and politics? What does this moment of the first reconstruction era have to say to your understanding of the second and, at Barber's urging, third reconstruction movements?
3. Consider one description of history (or a prominent person in history) that stood out for you in this chapter. What is it that caught your attention? Prompted further reflection? How do these reflections relate to William Faulkner's insight: "The past is never dead. It's not even the past."?
4. Barber describes the North Carolina State elections in 2010 as "a textbook example of racism without overt racists." What does he mean? How does this inform or problematize your definition of racism? What is Barber's implicit definition of "racism" here? Can you think of other examples of "racism without overt racists" in your own experience?
5. Reflecting on the experience of resistance in the political climate of North Carolina, Barber writes, "when we stand for what is good and right, evil will employ every power at its disposal to take us out." Do you agree or disagree? What do you think Barber intends by framing this struggle in such binary, moral terms? Is he effective?
6. Barber reflects that resistance "challenged us to go deeper with one another and with our analysis of the situation at hand." What does he mean by going deeper? What relationships and/or situations in your life and community would benefit by "going deeper"?

### **Chapter 6: *Many a Conflict, Many a Doubt***

1. What does it mean to you to "love your enemies"? It's striking that Jesus' command to "love your enemies" is present in Mark 5:43 and Luke 6:27, 35, but absent from what some describe as the most spiritualized gospel account of Jesus' preaching—Matthew. Barber interprets this command not simply as "a spiritual ideal to strive toward" but

also “strategic advice for long-term success in any freedom struggle.” How does Barber’s interpretation inform your own? What does it mean in a practical sense?

2. Although Barber advocates love for one’s enemy, he doesn’t advocate capitulation. How can one love and even learn from another person or group of people without sacrificing oneself, dignity, and morality? Do you believe Barber’s vision is possible? Why or why not?
3. What is the difference between framing the work of the fusion coalition as cultural rather than political? How did the cultural and political interact in North Carolina? How do they interact in your context today?
4. What previous knowledge did you have of the exception clause in the Thirteenth Amendment? How does this relate to current inequities in the American criminal justice system? Do you think such an exception for “involuntary servitude” should continue to exist?
5. Although it can be tempting to read Barber’s account of these justice struggles through rose-colored glasses, he wants to humanize our understanding. He writes, “We were not a coalition of angels, but a cross-section of North Carolina residents who had inherited its history of strife and division. Just as we were, we had come together.” Why is it important to acknowledge this history of strife and division? How does the evangelical hymn, “Just as I am” speak to Barber? How might it speak to you?
6. Why did Barber and his coalition partners discern the time was right for the direct action in response to the Wake County education budget? Are you drawn more to such direct action or the legal and political work of organizing? How do you discern when one is called for rather than the other?

### **Chapter 7: *The Darkness Before the Dawn***

1. Barber takes a realist, if not pessimistic, approach to human nature. He quotes Jeremiah: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). How do you understand human nature? Why do you think Barber presents it this way?
2. Implicit in Barber’s description of his political opponents’ worship life as “obligatory public appearances at church” is a critique of the moral character with which they conducted their private (and at times public) political lives. In your view, what is the relation between worship attendance and one’s moral or religious life?
3. The Rev. Dr. William Barber has been critiqued by the religious right for his alignment with LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations that support them and by the religious left for his personal religious teachings and alignment with individuals and organizations who do not fully support LGBTQIA+ rights. This is one of many examples of his observation that “the way to split a moral movement...is to get them arguing about morality.” What was his response? Do you find this sufficient? Is it possible to engage in a moral movement together with others whom you do not fully agree on all moral questions?
4. Reflect upon Barber’s statement that “the codification of hate is never righteous.” Do you agree or disagree? Do you think that those who promote the laws that the fusion

coalition is opposing would classify them as “codification of hate”? How does one draw the line?

5. What is the difference between transactional and transformational relationships? How does Barber describe this happening within the fusion coalition? Think of relationships in your life that fit into each of these categories. What sets one apart from the other? How are transformational relationships forged?
6. What role does music have in Barber’s spiritual life? In his activism? What is it about music that presents this capacity to inspire and transform? Is this limited to particular forms of music? What role does music have in your life?

### **Chapter 8: A Moral Movement for the Nation**

1. At the introduction to this chapter, Barber connects three moments: Holy Week in North Carolina in 2013, King’s Letter from the Birmingham Jail written Easter Weekend of 1963 and Jesus’ journey to the cross in Jerusalem in approximately the year 33. What holds these moments together? What motivated each to carry on with their movement even in the darkness or defeat? In light of these movements and their longer arcs, how does one define victory and defeat?
2. Reflect on the wisdom that Bob Zellner shares from Rosa Parks back in Montgomery: “When you see something that’s wrong, eventually you have to do something about it.”
3. Barber describes the format of Moral Mondays outside of the North Carolina legislature through the lens of liturgy. The word liturgy comes from the Greek word *leiturgia*, which means the “work of the people.” What do you think makes a gathering liturgical? Would you apply this term to the Moral Monday gatherings? Would you apply it unequivocally to worship gatherings? Why or why not?
4. How did the “proclaimed word put on the flesh” in North Carolina? How does it do so today? In your context?
5. As a fusion coalition, especially at the national level, the Poor People’s Campaign has had to navigate significant differences. The example of women’s rights and abortion provides a particularly timely example. How have Barber and his partners navigated these differences? Do you feel this is sustainable? Why or why not?
6. Barber contends, “We cannot fulfill Dr. King’s dream by building monuments and holding commemorations in Washington, DC. No, we must heed what he said and go home.” What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? How might this influence how you commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. Day this year?

### **Chapter 9: America’s Third Reconstruction**

1. The old adage, “The best laid plans...” seems to ring true in Barber’s experience. Think of a time when, for the sake of something larger, you have had to remake your plans. What is the value of continued planning in light of the need to pivot? Why is the need to remake plans so central to continued success?
2. Barber describes singing “Blessed Be the Tie that Binds” together with a newly forming fusion coalition in a small town in the North Carolina mountains. In the midst of racial,

geographic, religious, and political differences, what ties brought this coalition together? What ties can bind your community together? Our community as a nation?

3. The use of historical language of reconstruction for the present movement is intentional on Barber's part. He maintains the necessity to move beyond party politics and "learn freedom movement history." How has the history of reconstruction and "partial progress" that he recounts helped you to understand this moment in time? Do you agree with Barber that America is in "deep need for a Third Reconstruction"? Why or why not? What must a Third Reconstruction entail?
4. What does the history of the freedom movement and previous reconstruction eras lend to your understanding of the past? To your understanding of a Third Reconstruction? To your understanding of the future?
5. Barber maintains, "When any of us suffer, all of us suffer." Do you find this to be true? Why or why not? Why do you think Barber is convinced of this? Is such an understanding necessary for moral fusion?
6. This final chapter ends with the proclamation, "Forward together! Not one step back!" The book was published in January of 2016. Where has the Poor People's Campaign gone since there? Have they held to this mantra? Is such a commitment possible? If so, what does it mean to you?

#### **Afterword by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove**

1. Wilson-Hartgrove, as a white man, has partnered together with Barber in his work. However, he maintains that "White America's job is not to take the lead, but to pledge our allegiance." What does this mean to you? Why do you think he maintains this? Do you agree or disagree?
2. Barber ends with a call towards forward movement. Wilson-Hartgrove echoes this in his afterword. He reflects, "Fusion politics is about one step after another towards a relationship with people who are supposed to be our enemies." What might such a journey look like in your life? How does this connect to what Barber advocates?