

# DISCERNMENT

*Theology and the Practice of Ministry*

---

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 2

---

## Book Review: Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love

Grady King

*Hope Network Ministries*, [grady@hopenetworkministries.org](mailto:grady@hopenetworkministries.org)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

King, Grady () "Book Review: Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*. Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol6/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ ACU.

# DISCERNMENT

*Theology and the Practice of Ministry*

## Book Review

*Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love*, by William H. Willimon, Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. 91 pages, \$12.

*Reviewer: Grady King*

Willimon, professor of the practice of Christian ministry at Duke University Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina and former dean of the chapel at Duke University authors this book in response to the 2016 election of President Trump. “Let’s face it,” Willimon begins. “A major reason why American elected Donald Trump president is that he so skillfully leveraged our fear of Others into votes for him. . . . Witnessing our president’s pandering to public hysteria gave me the idea of this book. . . . I write not to castigate the moral failings of the president (low-hanging fruit) but rather to instigate thinking *as Christians* about the Other” (ix).

Xenophobia—the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange—is the dominant theme of this work. This is timely, given we are living in xenophobic culture: “An outbreak of xenophobia and irrational fear of the Others is a divine summons for American Christians to stand up, speak out, and live up to our beliefs that Jesus Christ is Lord and other presumed lordlets are not” (x).

Willimon grounds his work in the clear, yet profoundly challenging words of John the apostle, “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4.18). Admittedly, simple to read, difficult to live. This verse is particularly poignant when our fears relate to everyone as “the Other.” Willimon begins with establishing a theological foundation for understanding “Other” and the Christian response. “Any Christian move toward the Other is based upon Jesus Christ’s move toward us” (3).

Only five chapters constitute this brief, yet robust treatment of fear of the Other. Ample biblical citations and robust theological reasoning substantiate the various nuances of the “Other” for pastoral work. Willimon references philosophers and theologians from Aristotle and Kierkegaard to

Solzhenitsyn, Niebuhr, Barth, Frederick Douglass, John Bradford, and Tom Long.

“Xenophobia is not only historical, it is biological,” asserts Willimon as he explores the neurobiology of xenophobia (23) and the need to train our fears—“By mindful attempts to coax our brains to think through our fears, we can achieve a greater sense of overall well-being. The sense that we have choices in regard to our fear is a powerful antidote to fear” (27).

Willimon is a practical theologian and writes in service of the community of faith by urging believers to think and act like Christians. The five chapter titles show the trajectory of the book with the theme of imitating God in his radical love of the Other.

1. Saved by the Other
2. The Other, My Enemy
3. Learning to Fear Like Christians
4. Loving the Other at Church
5. Jesus, the Other

Each chapter includes class or small group discussion questions for practical and challenging applications.

Chapter three, “Learning to Fear Like Christians,” is particularly challenging for communities of faith that tend to live in holy huddles in fear of the Other and propagate the rhetoric of fear. “Courage is not the absence of fear but rather having a reason for doing the right thing in spite of our fear—fearing, revering, and honoring something more than safety” (36). Willimon rightly identifies the problem: “Our problem, in regard to fear, is that we fear the Other more than we fear the God who commands, “Love each other” (39). The author calls Christians back to their baptism as their core identity in Christ that reframes everything in Christian life. “While we are so proudly asserting that “I am me,” Christians must also stress that my signifiers like class, gender, tribe, race and history are now being reframed and reinterpreted by the infinitely more determinative qualifier—*baptized*” (50).

In the end, it is Jesus who shows us how to love the Other. Willimon explores in fresh ways the parable of the Good Samaritan and leaves no doubt in answering the question, “Who is my neighbor whom I ought to love as much as myself?” (90).

This book goes far beyond its genesis of responding to the election of Donald Trump “leveraging fear.” It is, in every way, a work about

thinking and acting like Christians rooted in the life of God in Jesus Christ. It is timely in our anxiety-driven, fearful of the Other culture.

**Grady D. King** (DMin, Abilene Christian University) is vice president and co-leader of HOPE Network: Mentoring Leaders, Guiding Churches. He is also Director of Church Resources at Oklahoma Christian University.