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M.Volf

Miroslav Volf is the son of a pentecostal preacher from a country that no longer exists, Yugoslavia. He has witnessed the destruction of his country through ethnic conflict and wars. Religion played an important role in these conflicts. Ever since, Volf is reflecting on issues of religion and conflict. He is currently professor at Yale Divinity School in the USA and can be considered an expert in this field.

Volf's search for reconciliation and peace is an important force behind his book *Allah, A Christian Response*. His thesis is, that Muslims and Christian should acknowledge that Allah and God are the same, if they ever want to live in peace with each other. With examples from history he shows how essential this is. Sometimes Christians looked for similarities and for what Christians and Muslims had in common, often they emphasized the differences. This immediately impacted relationships in society.

Volf searches for the connections. By summarizing the teachings of some great thinkers of Islam, like Al-Ghazali, he portrays an image of Islam that is much closer to Christianity than often thought. He does not ignore or erase the differences, but also wants to be completely honest and fair about Islam, both with respect to the place of violence in Islam as supposed legalism.

Volf emphasizes that he fully subscribes to the truths of classical Christianity. When he says that Muslims and Christians ultimately speak about the same God, this does not imply for him that Islam and Christianity are basically identical or different expressions of the same divine mystery. Neither are they both valid ways of salvation. He is not speaking about 'salvifici' knowledge of God, but about relevant knowledge of God for society. He does not develop a missionary vision, but a political.

It is fascinating what Volf is writing. He refuses any kind of simplistic or hostile stereotyping of Islam. He makes a theological effort of Jesus' commission to approach every enemy as a friend. His thesis, that we can only live in peace when we acknowledge that we worship the same God, for is too limited. I think the challenge for Muslims and Christians is more to live in peace precisely when they disagree on certain issues, whether this concerns their view of God or of daily life as communities. That exactly is the crucial dilemma when relationships between Muslims and Christians worldwide are critical. How can both communities be loyal to their faith in God and to what God demands from them and still constructively work for peace in the world. That does not exclude recognition of basic things we have in common, but it creates more space to also include in the process the difficult aspects of the relation between Muslims and Christians. It can also help to continue discussing religious freedom and persecution, concerning Christians and Muslims.

Nevertheless, I think that *Allah, a Christian Response*, is a book that no leader in church or society can ignore. The issues it raises cannot be disregarded, they need to be discussed

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