

Chapter Sixteen

One God means Peaceful Coexistence?

Influential Yale theologian Miroslav Volf has argued that Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

Volf's exploration of this subject is driven by an agenda in political theology. For him 'Two supreme divine beings always means war.'¹ Therefore he asserts: 'Whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God is ... the driving question for the relation between these two religions globally.'² When Volf asks the question: 'Can religious exclusivists, adherents of different religions [i.e. Muslims and Christians], live comfortably with one another under the same political roof?'³ his answer is 'Yes, because Allah and YHWH are the same God'.

"Two supreme divine beings always means war" – Miroslav Volf.

- 1 Miroslav Volf, 'Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God'. The Huffington Post, 3 March 2011. < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/miroslav-volf/god-versus-allah_b_829955.html>
- 2 Miroslav Volf, 'Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God'.
- 3 Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.220.

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According to Volf, because Muslims and Christians 'share ... belief in one benevolent God who commands all people to love their neighbors' this shared belief 'favors pluralism as a political project.'¹ Based on their faith in a good God who commands love for the neighbor, 'Christians and Muslims must embrace two simple principles,'² namely that everyone has a right to practice their own faith, and everyone has the right to change their religion. These principles then provide the political covering for the two faiths to coexist peacefully.

Volf's argument keys into rising anxiety about radical political Islam. There is a meme in Western society that differences between religions are the root cause of conflict and wars, and Volf capitalizes on this idea by asserting that Islam and Christianity are not all that different after all, so they should be able to get on. He also denigrates those who argue that Allah and YHWH are different gods, calling them 'fearful people bent on domination':

The fact of the matter is this: fearful people bent on domination have created the contest for supremacy between Yahweh, the God of the Bible, and Allah, the God of the Quran. The two are one God, albeit differently understood.³

As someone who has only reluctantly and after a long period of investigation come to the conclusion that the Bible and the Quran speak of different gods, I find it confronting to be named among those demonized by Volf's rhetoric. What can account for the closure of a mind to the possibility that a careful and respectful, yet fearless examination of the available evidence could lead someone to the conclusion that the two religions worship distinct Gods?

Before launching into a response to Volf's views, we must take issue with his highly dubious guiding assumption that belief in different gods 'always means war'. An obvious counter to this

- 1 Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.227.
- 2 Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.237.
- 3 Miroslav Volf, 'Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God'. The Huffington Post, 3 March 2011. < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/miroslav-volf/god-versus-allah_b_829955.html>

is the societies, such as Singapore or even the United States, where people do not all believe in the same supreme being, yet they manage to get on. On the other hand, there are nations like Syria, where Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims are at the present time going to war with each other, despite believing in the same god.

Volf's hermeneutic and Six Core Beliefs of Monotheism

Volf applies two interpretive principles to his study of Islam.

1. 'Concentrate on what is common,' and
2. 'Keep an eye out for what is decisively different.'¹

Using these principles, Volf presents a set of claims about God, which he contends are shared by 'normative' Islam, and 'normative' Christianity (p.123). According to Volf, the six core beliefs of monotheism are:

1. There is only one God.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is radically different from everything that is not God.
4. God is good.
5. God commands us to love God, and
6. God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The first four beliefs, Volf says, establish his claim that, when people say *God* (or *Allah*), they refer to the same object, while the final two reinforce this claim.²

The greatest difficulties with Volf's argument concern the sixth core belief: that God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but there are also problems supporting his fourth: that the God of Islam is good.

Again and again, to support his contention that Allah commands love of the neighbor, Volf distorts Islamic doctrines and sources. The distortions do not appear to be deliberate, but they betray

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.91.

² Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.110.

the existence of strategically placed blind spots – theological fig leaves – all around the Islamic doctrine of warfare against unbelievers. The Islamic *jihad* is a core issue, not only because it goes to the heart of the question of whether Allah is a god of love who commands love of the neighbor, but also because it impacts on Volf's purpose of constructing a theological roof for Christians and Muslims to coexist peacefully.

Martyrdom Operations

One example of Volf's blind spots – in his peripheral field of vision, one might say – is the claim that Islam rejects suicide bombing. In a brief discussion of martyrdom operations, Volf cites the Amman letter to Pope Benedict¹ as evidence that 'normative' Islam condemns 'suicide terrorism'.² The Amman letter was written to Pope Benedict by Muslim scholars after he gave a lecture in Regensburg which criticized Islam.

Volf's citation of the Amman letter is in spite of the fact there is no reference to or discussion of suicide terrorism in that letter.

Volf also seems to be unaware that among the Amman letter's signatories were several eminent Muslim scholars who have endorsed what they prefer to call 'martyrdom operations':

- Shaikh Ali Jum'u'ah, Grand Mufti of Egypt and Amman letter signatory, has stated, 'The one who carries out Fedaii [martyrdom] operations against the Zionists and blows himself up is, without a doubt, a Shahid [martyr] because he is defending his homeland against the occupying enemy who is supported by superpowers such as the U.S. and Britain.'³
- The second signatory to the Amman letter, Sheikh al-Buti of Syria, has said martyrdom operations are completely legitimate if the motive is to spite the enemy.⁴

¹ <http://www.ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>.

² Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 112.

³ <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/961.htm>.

⁴ Cited by Nawaf Hayel Al-Takrouri in *Martyrdom Operations in Islamic Jurisprudence (al-Amaliyat al-Istishhadiyya fi'l Mizan al-Fiqhi)*. http://www.dorar.net/book_index/270.

- Another signatory, Shaykh Ahmad Al-Khalili, Grand Mufti of Oman, has made the same point: 'We are quite sure that the Jews are in their way to extinction, this is the promise of Allah ... Suicide is human boredom of life and his intention to kill himself, those Palestinian mujahideen are not bored with life and their intention was not to kill themselves: instead, they wanted to spite their enemy.'¹

In reality a great many leading Muslim scholars endorse 'martyrdom operations', or what Volf calls 'suicide terrorism.'² They would all agree with Volf that Islam forbids suicide, but consider that if the intention of a bomber is to attack a legitimate enemy, blowing oneself up is not considered to be suicide. When Volf says that normative Islam rejects 'suicide terrorism' he misunderstands what Muslim scholars mean when they refer to 'suicide', and overlooks their glorification of 'martyrdom operations'.

'Martyrdom operations are completely legitimate if the motive is to spite the enemy' – Al-Buti

Aggressive Jihad

A more serious blind spot – right in the center of the field of Volf's vision of religious conflict – becomes apparent when Volf claims that the use of military force to extend Islam is 'rejected by all leading Muslim scholars today,'³ again citing the Amman Letter.

In reality, nothing in the Amman letter rejects aggressive jihad. What it rejects is killing people simply for the sake of their faith, and the use of force to compel conversions. What it most categorically does **not** reject is the use of warfare to extend the political dominance of Islam over unbelievers.

¹ <http://www.buraimi.net/vb/showthread.php?t=10232>.

² See for example the list of scholars given at: <http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/fatawa/alamaliyat/alfatawa.htm>.

³ Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p.210.

As Haykal's magisterial 1993 survey of jihad in Islam showed, many leading Muslim scholars, both past and present, have endorsed jihad to make Islam dominant in the world.¹ Indeed the consensus view of classical scholars is that the **primary** purpose of military jihad is to extend Islam. This view was endorsed, for example, by the Shafi'i jurist al-Ghazali, of whom Volf states 'he is in many ways the most representative Muslim thinker you'll find, from any period.'²

Another source which Volf relies upon is the Common Word Letter, which was addressed by leading Muslim scholars to the Christians of the world.³ Volf was one of the authors of the influential Yale Response to the Common Word letter,⁴ and a leader on the Christian side in dialogue meetings which resulted from the Common Word initiative.⁵

Despite Volf's reliance upon the Common Word Letter and the Amman Letter to support his claims about Islam's rejection of aggressive jihad, among the signatories of these two letters can be found several unashamed advocates for aggressive jihad. For example, M. Taqi Uthmani, one of the leading Muslim jurists in the world today, and signatory to both the Amman letter and the Common Word letter, has taught that

Aggressive Jihad is lawful even today... Its justification cannot be veiled ... we should venerate ... this expansionism with complete self-confidence.⁶

Muhammad Salim Al-Awwa, an Egyptian cleric, is another prominent Muslim scholar who signed the Common Word letter.⁷ He has pointed out that the word for Islamic conquests in Arabic is *futūh* 'openings'. This reflects the fact that the purpose

¹ *Al-Jihad wa-l-qital fi al-siyasa al-sharia'iyya* 'Jihad and Fighting according to the Shar'i Policy'; see overview in David Cook's *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 124-127.

² Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 169.

³ <http://www.acommonword.com/>.

⁴ <http://www.yale.edu/faith/acw/acw.htm>.

⁵ See for example <http://www.yale.edu/divinity/commonword/>.

⁶ *Islam and Modernism* pp. 138-139.

⁷ An image of his signature can be found here: [http://www.acommonword.com/lib/signs/Dr. Muhammad Saleem Al Awwa-Egypt.pdf](http://www.acommonword.com/lib/signs/Dr._Muhammad_Saleem_Al_Awwa-Egypt.pdf).

of conquest in Islam is 'to clear the way between Muslims and the invitation to Allah without the obstruction of the [non-Muslim] rulers.' In other words, conquest opens up a land to Islam by replacing non-Muslim rule with an Islamic state, thus eliminating political obstacles to the Islamic mission.¹

Another eminent signatory to both the Common Word letter and the Amman letter was Sheikh Al-Buti of Syria, whose magisterial work on Islamic jurisprudence repeatedly rejects the claim that the Islamic jihad is a defensive concept:

... it is meaningless in speaking of jihad to distinguish between defensive war and offensive war, for the aim of jihad is neither defense for its own sake nor offense for its own sake. Rather its aim is to meet the need for the establishment of an Islamic society with all of its associated systems and principles. Once this aim has been achieved, it make no difference whether it came about by means of defense or offense.²

Aggressive jihad is also supported by many Saudi scholars, such as Shaykh Muhammad al-Munajjid, who has said, 'Undoubtedly taking the initiative in fighting has a great effect in spreading Islam and bringing people into the religion of Allaah in crowds.'³

The Killing of 'Innocents'

Another error made by Volf is his invocation of the oft-heard mantra that 'Islam forbids the killing of innocents'. The key question to be asked in response is this 'Who then is innocent?' In fact what sharia jurisprudence forbids is the killing of those whose lives Islamic law does not allow to be taken. The classical view is that the blood of non-Muslims not living under a *dhimma* pact – i.e. those not protected by Islamic rule – is *halal*, and not protected.

1 <http://www.islam-qa.com/en/ref/43087/jihad>.

2 Al-Buti. *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p. 224.

3 <http://www.islam-qa.com/en/ref/43087/jihad>.

While it is true that the laws of jihad ideally forbid the killing of women and children – these should be enslaved rather than killed – it is permitted for infidel adult males to be killed, if they are not under the 'protection' of an Islamic government.

The liability of unprotected non-Muslims to be killed is based on the rejection of non-Muslim religions as a form of *shirk*, the unforgivable sin. The very existence of *shirk* is considered by some jurists to be *fitnah*, or 'persecution' of Muslims.¹

The renowned commentator Ibn Kathir explains in his discussion of the Quranic phrases '*fitnah* is worse than killing' (Q2:191; Q8:39) and 'fight them until there is no more *fitnah*' (Q2:193, 2:217) that non-Muslims, by virtue of their disbelief in Islam, are by definition 'unjust' and guilty of 'committing *shirk*', so they are liable to be fought against and killed:

... Allah indicated that **these men are committing disbelief in Allah, associating with Him** (in the worship) and hindering from His path, and this is a much greater evil and more disastrous than killing. Abu Malik commented about what Allah said: 'And Al-Fitnah is worse than killing.' Meaning what you (disbelievers) are committing is much worse than killing. ...'And *Al-Fitnah* is worse than killing.' [means] '**Shirk (polytheism) is worse than killing.**'²

Verily aggression can only be started against the unjust. ... the meaning of the Ayah [verse] indicates that, 'If they abandon their injustice, which is *Shirk* in this case, then do not start aggression against them afterwards.' ... 'Ikrimah and Qatadah stated, '**The unjust person is he who refuses to proclaim, 'There is no God worthy of worship except Allah.**'³

Even killing women and children is allowed by many Islamic authorities under certain circumstances, in accordance with what Al-Buti refers to as 'the Muslims' best interests.'⁴ For example, Volf's favoured authority Al-Ghazali wrote '[O]ne

1 Mark Durie, *The Third Choice*, pp.96-98.

2 *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, commentary on Q2:191.

3 *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, commentary on Q2:193.

4 Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.510.

must go on jihad at least once a year... one may use a catapult against them when they are in a fortress, even if among them are women and children. One may set fire to them and/or drown them.¹

A Crucial Blind Spot: Love for which Neighbour?

The crux of Volf's argument is a claim about the love of one's neighbor. Absolutely pivotal is a hadith which Volf takes is a command to love 'all' neighbors,² including non-Muslims. Volf derived this insight this from the Common Word letter, which makes use of an edited version of this tradition. The exact text of this hadith is reproduced here, including its chapter heading from the *Sahih Muslim*:

Chapter 18: CONCERNING THE FACT THAT IT IS ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IMAN [Faith] THAT ONE SHOULD LIKE THE SAME THING FOR ONE'S BROTHER-IN-ISLAM AS ONE LIKES FOR ONE'S SELF

§72: It is attested on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) observed: one amongst you believes (truly) till one likes for his brother or for his neighbour that which he loves for himself.

§73: It is narrated on the authority of Anas that the Prophet (may peace blessings be upon him) observed: By Him in whose Hand is my life, no, bondsman (truly) believes till he likes for his neighbour, or he (the Holy Prophet) said: for his brother, whatever he likes for himself. (*Sahih Muslim, The Book of Faith (Kitab al-Iman)*)³

1 Andrew Bostom, *The Legacy of Jihad*, p. 199.

2 Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 182.

3 *Sahih Muslim*, The Book of Faith, Chapter 18 <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muslim/001.smt.html> - 001.0072. This interpretation is also backed up by commentaries on *Sahih Muslim*: see <http://acommonword.blogspot.com/2008/02/notes-for-christians-on-understanding.html> and <http://acommonword.blogspot.com/2008/03/more-on-loving-ones-muslim-neighbour-in.html>.

The first thing to note about this hadith is that the chapter heading in the very source Volf cites makes clear that the tradition is about loving one's *Muslim* neighbor, not 'all' neighbors.

The second thing is that the hadith exists in different forms, and the preferred reading (listed first) is 'brother', understood in Islam to refer to a fellow Muslim.

The version of this tradition found in the even more revered *Sahih al-Bukhari* omits the 'neighbor' reading altogether: "The Prophet said, 'None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself.'"¹

It is also striking that Volf is unable to cite a single verse of the Quran to support the idea that Allah commands love for one's neighbor.

What *can* be found in the Quran are disturbing instructions on how to deal with non-Muslim neighbors, such as Q9:123 'O you who believe! Fight [to kill] those who are near to you of the disbelievers, and let them find harshness in you. And know that Allah is with those who fear him.'

Loving God?

One must also reject the evidence Volf uses to justify his claim that Islam 'commands us to love God with our whole being.'² To show this, Volf cites *Allahu wahdahu* 'God alone', from Q39:45, and rather grandiosely translates it as 'God, One and Only'.

However the verse in question literally says: 'When *God alone* is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter shrink back with aversion; but when those besides him are mentioned, behold, they rejoice.' It is hard to see how this is a command to 'love God with our whole being.' The intent of this verse is simply to excoriate those who do not accept Islam.

1 The word 'Muslim' is added by the translator in brackets to make the accepted meaning crystal clear. <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/bukhari/002.sbt.html> - 001.002.013.

2 Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 104.

In theology the weight of evidence is significant. It is not enough to point out that something can be found somewhere in the Quran. One should also ask how central the theme of love for and by Allah is in the overall message of the Quran. In fact the statement that Allah is loving is found only twice (Q11:90, Q85:14). Scores of other attributes of Allah are far more central and are mentioned more frequently than love (such as The Creator or The Omnipotent). This paucity of references to the love of Allah contrasts with the hundreds of references to God's love in the Bible, including in central descriptions of the character of God, such as God's revelation of himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6.

Leaps of Logic and Selective use of Evidence

Again and again, the impression given throughout *Allah* is of someone who is anxious to achieve his stated agenda of establishing a political theology for mutual coexistence: so anxious that he is blind to contrary evidence – even when it is readily available – and makes startling unwarranted logical and rhetorical leaps in stretching to reach for his goal.

For example, Volf cites verses of the Quran to show that the God of the Quran loves,¹ but then, without explanation, he immediately transforms this into 'God is good'. These two claims are not the same, and the first is much easier to justify from the Quran than the second: 'The Good' is not one of the famous 99 names of Allah.

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 101.

Another example is Volf's claim that the Quran's commands are similar to the Ten Commandments of Moses. The problem is that there are injunctions in the Quran which explicitly contradict the Ten Commandments, specifically in the context of relations with non-Muslims. For example there are verses which command killing disbelievers (e.g. Q9:5); a verse which endorses sexual intercourse with (non-Muslim) married captive women (Q4:24; see also Q4:3, Q23:6, Q33:50, Q70:29–30); verses which encourage Muslims to take booty from disbelievers (e.g. Q48:20); a verse and associated hadith which encourage Muslims to disrespect their non-Muslim parents if they are hostile to Islam, Q60:8–9; and verses which incite deceiving disbelievers under certain circumstances (e.g. Q3:28).

Proof by Contradiction?

Volf contends that common belief in the one God requires both Muslims and Christians to support the impartiality of the state toward all religions,¹ and specifically to embrace freedom of religion, without interference by the state, including the freedom to leave or change one's religion.² In light of this, it is astounding that he devotes no space to considering on what grounds Islam has based its unreciprocal treatment of the *dhimmi*s – non-Muslims living in an Islamic society – nor to considering the grounds Islam uses to justify its famous apostasy law, which prescribes death to those who leave Islam.

The result is that Volf's conclusions are starkly at odds with normative Islamic beliefs and practices, even in today's world, and with the lived reality of millions of Christians under Islamic conditions. In the prescient words of William Montgomery Watt in 1993:

There are undoubtedly some Islamic states which treat non-Muslim citizens in ways which can only be described as oppressive ... It is of the utmost importance that Muslim jurists should consider whether such treatment of non-Muslims is in accordance with the Shari'ah or contrary to

¹ Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 238.

² Miroslav Volf, *Allah*, p. 234.

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it. More generally, does the Shari'ah allow Muslims to live peaceably with non-Muslims in the 'one world'...? To have an answer to these questions may be a matter of urgency in a few years time.¹

It has also to be emphasized that sharia implementation is not specifically a Muslim-Christian issue. The sharia raises much broader human rights issues, which impact severely upon Hindus in Pakistan, Zoroastrians in Iran, Ahmadiyyas in Indonesia, apostates from Islam in just about any nation, and, of course, Muslim women everywhere. The real political question is not how Christians and Muslims can live together, or whether the God of the Bible can be reconciled with the god of the Quran, but how Islam can coexist with non-Islam.

Muhammad, the Quran and normative Islam consistently teach that Muslims should strive to achieve political dominance over the adherents of other religions. For example Q48:28 states, 'He [Allah] has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may cause it to triumph over all religion.' This belief is expounded in countless commentaries, legal textbooks and writings of Muslim scholars, past and present: it is a core part of normative Islam, which has not yet been renounced by the Islamic mainstream. Volf's credibility gap is so great – on topics such as freedom of religion, treatment of apostates, and the political status of non-Muslims in an Islamic state – that he virtually mounts a proof-by-contradiction against himself, in which his premises are undermined by his conclusions. It is upon this rock that Volf's whole thesis founders.

Does Fear Drive Volf's One-God Hypothesis?

Volf has contended that fear is the reason why people pursue the 'different Gods' hypothesis, and it is fear which causes them to seek to dominate others.

However Volf's own reading of Islamic sources betrays huge blind spots, which are invariably placed, like Adam and Eve's fig leaves, where they conceal things which might offend. At the

¹ William Montgomery Watt. Review of Bat Ye'or, *Les Chrétientés d'Orient entre Jihâd et Dhimmitude*. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 1993.

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same time, Volf insists that his thesis 'must' be accepted if war is to be avoided.

Could it not be possible that Volf's blind spots are manifestations of cognitive dissonance which is itself driven by fear of the very conflict he seeks to avoid? When reality is unwelcome, discomfort caused by the gap between one's worldview and reality can motivate powerful coping mechanisms designed to keep cognitive dissonance at bay. The strategic placement of Volf's blind spots is evidence of these coping mechanisms at work.

Sheikh al-Buti, a renowned contemporary Syrian scholar of Islam and preacher at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, reflected over many years about commentary on jihad by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. He concluded that fear of Islam is the underlying reason why jihad is falsely claimed to be only a defensive doctrine. This comes about, he says, by two means:

On the one hand 'Orientalists' (i.e. Western non-Muslim scholars) are afraid of the Islamic jihad so they seek to convince Muslims that Islam is not aggressive. They do this by claiming that:

Islam is a religion of peace and love in which armed struggle would never be given legitimacy except for the repulsion of unannounced aggression, and whose followers would never go to war unless they were forced to do so because some other party had initiated hostilities.¹

This claim is only made because they:

...fear the emergence of the notion of jihad among the Muslims, lest they be united in their thoughts, and take a stand against their enemies, and it is for this reason that they seek to promote the belief that jihad has been abrogated.²

¹ Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.224.

² Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.226, citing Wahbah al-Zuhayli's *Athar al-Harb fi al-Fiqh al-Islami*.

The intentional aim of these non-Muslims is:

...to seek to achieve by means of various carefully studied premises and tactics ... to erase the notion of jihad from the minds of all Muslims, thereby putting to death any ambitions which they might cherish in their hearts.¹

On the other hand, Westerners, out of ill-will, can promote the view that Islam is 'a religion of tyranny and hatred toward non-Muslims.' The purpose of this is to put Muslims on the defensive, setting them up to accept the claim that 'Islam is a religion of peace and love,' which rejects the sword altogether.

...they promote the notion that Islam is a religion of tyranny and hatred toward non-Muslims, then they wait until this rumor had aroused the desired reactions among Muslims, who duly begin seeking means of refuting this unjust description of Islam. Then, while the Muslims are busy searching for the appropriate response to this misrepresentation, one of these same cynics concocts a defense of Islam – based, no doubt, on painstaking, unbiased research and inquiry – saying, in effect: 'Islam is not, as some have claimed, a religion of the sword; rather, quite to the contrary, it is a religion of peace and love which would never legislate armed struggle unless there were a need to repel unanticipated aggression, and its adherents would never be encouraged to consider war so long as there is a way to maintain peace.' Disturbed by the initial fabrication about Islam, simple-minded Muslims gave an enthusiastic applause to this 'splendid' defense.²

Sheikh Al-Bouti's considered view is that Muslims have a variety of options available to them with respect to jihad, depending upon the prevailing circumstances, including:

- 'peaceful coexistence and the provision of advice, instruction, and guidance, in which case jihad is to be interpreted accordingly'

¹ Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.224

² Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.225.

- 'defensive warfare combined with admonition, guidance, and direction, all of which are also legitimate means of engaging in jihad.'
- 'aggressive warfare, which some consider to be the sublimest form of jihad.'

He emphasizes that all the various teachings on jihad from the Quran, whether peaceful, defensive or aggressive, are still applicable, but their application depends upon the circumstances in which Muslims find themselves:

...all three of the above mentioned approaches to the practice of jihad are equally legitimate, provided that none of them be applied unless it is required by the Muslim community's current interests...²

Indeed he points out that aggressive jihad should be preceded by a phase of peaceful presentation of Islam:

It is only fitting that armed struggle should be preceded by a reasoned explanation of Islam, with a call to embrace it, a presentation of the arguments in its favor, and attempts to solve any problems which might prevent its being properly understood. These are the initial stages of jihad, and it is the joint responsibility of all Muslims to participate in them.³

None of this is particularly favorable for Volf's claim that a shared faith in the one God can provide a common political roof under which Islam and Christianity can coexist peacefully.

Volf is not alone. In the present day, the number of authorities is legion who clamor to affirm that jihad is defensive and Islam means peace. Al-Buti is correct in identifying the fear of Islam as one factor which drives this deceptive discourse. But there are other factors. One is that some Muslims find the dogma of aggressive jihad shameful and indefensible, so they suppress it.

¹ Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.542.

² Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.543.

³ Al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, p.222.

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Another factor, which may well apply in Volf's case, is that he may be motivated by the fear of finding himself to be an excluder and a bigot. A secondary function of all those blind spots could be to protect Volf from playing the role of a rejector.

In the present day, the number of authorities is legion who clamor to affirm that jihad is defensive and Islam means 'peace'.

My own view is that one must approach the question of the identity of Allah and YHWH objectively, and without fear of consequences, in a manner which is as sincere and disinterested as one can achieve. Despite its political implications, this subject must not be approached as an exercise in shotgun theology, in which someone holds a gun to the head of good-hearted Christians, saying 'one God or else'.