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TH 502

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## Chapter 2 : Improper identification of God: Is the Father of Jesus, the God of Muhammad?

### 1: Summary of Chapter - In chapter 2 of Tennent's *Theology in the Context of World*

Christianity, the author sets out to answer questions that came to bumps shortly after the September 11, 2001's attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. In order to respond to a world steeped in a newfound curiosity of "inter-religious dialogue" (25), the author sifts through three similar but fundamentally different questions to wrestle with the topic at hand. (1) Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? (2) Are the terms "Allah" and "God" interchangeable? (3) Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?.. First, Tennent "examines the etymology<sup>1</sup> of the word "Allah" and its use by pre-Islamic and later non-Islamic monotheistic peoples in Arabia" (27-31). One interesting statement in this section was the origin of the word Allah, to which the writer states, "A plausible explanation is that the word "Allah" did not emerge as the conflation of two separate words, but is derived from the Aramaic and Syriac word for God," (29). Next, the writer "explores the ontology<sup>2</sup> of monotheism and how this relates to the many ways God is spoken of in the Qur'an and the Bible (31-37). In terms of the fundamental, nature and being, Tennent writes, "there is a fundamental difference in the way the word "Allah" functions in its contemporary usage by Arabic-speaking Christians and Arabic-speaking Muslims" (37). Finally, the author surveys several pastoral and practical considerations crucial to the question at hand (38-48). My favorite line in this section would be Tennent's quote of Clement of

<sup>1</sup> The study of the origin of words and how their meanings have changed throughout history.

<sup>2</sup> The branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

Alexandria, "the pagans were given the stars to worship so they might not fall into atheism: "It was a road given to them, that in worshipping the stars they might look up to God" (44). Perhaps we, as Christians, have been a bit too hard on those outside our faith.

2: Missional Implications - The statement which stood out most to me in this section was, "Migrating Christians brought into Arabia a diverse smorgasbord of Christological views, including Monophysite, Nestorian, and Arian views" (30). Especially in terms of Arian views, I can see how this would fuel the beginnings of Islam. Definitely has some excellent food for thought... However, the topic I believe would be the most useful on the mission field is, "If monotheism, by definition, affirms that (ontologically speaking) there is one, and only one, God over the entire universe, then, as Jon Levenson has observed, "no monotheist can ever accuse anyone — certainly not another monotheist — of worshiping another God, only (at most) of improperly identifying the one God that both seek to serve" (31). For the mission field, if Christians could create a one-page infographic to help Muslims see the difference between the character, worship, and other nuances, perhaps it would aid in identifying why Jesus Christ should be the God of their sincere worship.

3: Key Learning Question - "Linguistically speaking, the fideist and the rationalist may both use the word "God," but the common predicates that both can affirm are far more limited than one might think. The result is that even a common word, because of usage and context, may have very different meanings to different groups who use it. This is why the etymological argument examined earlier cannot be used to fully settle the issue of the interchangeability of the words "God" and "Allah." This leaves me to ask, the question which I already have an answer to, "Is the Allah as revealed in the identical to the Allah as revealed in an Arabic Bible?" the answer is obviously "no" (33). However, Tennent is correct, "church leaders can no longer afford to study the doctrine of God in a vacuum" (27).