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ALLAH DOES NOT BELONG TO ISLAM

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Since September 11, scores of commentaries have been written about terrorism and Islam, many from Christian leaders. It is remarkable how writers unfamiliar with the Arabic language have ventured comments, if not judgments, relating to the term *Allah*. It is as if anything to do with *Allah* must be demonized in order for us to feel righteous and justified.

In a news clip on KFUE-AM Radio in St. Louis, shortly after the 9-11 tragedy, Tim LaHaye, noted evangelical speaker and coauthor of the *Left Behind* series, said, "*Allah* is not the God the Bible. He is an evil spirit that results in murder." I have to assume Tim LaHaye is not fluent in Arabic! He is, however, not alone in referring to a Qur'anic interpretation or concept of God. Many Westerners seem unaware that *Allah* is the God Arabic-speaking Christians worship. The Arabic Bible is replete with the word *Allah*, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation. Jesus Christ is even called the son of *Allah* in the Arabic Scriptures.

Arabic-speaking Coptic, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Maronite, evangelical, and Reformed Christians worship *Allah*, which is simply the word or term for God in another language. Islam does not hold a copyright to the term. In fact, Arab Christians existed before Islam appeared on the scene. Christians who worship *Allah* number in the millions, and their biblical version of *Allah* differs from the Qur'anic version. To demean or demonize the word for God in another language does a great disservice to believers who speak that language. Opportunities to win a hearing or dialogue between Christians and Arabic-speaking Muslims vis-à-vis Jesus Christ are also minimized.

It is time for all of us, especially Christians, to exercise caution when it comes to attacking the term for God in a language foreign to most of us. No other term exists in Arabic for the God Christians claim to be the one, true God. Western Christians do not normally use Hebrew terms for God in their languages. They cannot expect Arab Christians to use any other term or word for theirs. *Allah* is equivalent to the English *God*, the French *Dieu*, or the Spanish *Dios*.

In a *World* magazine issue on terrorism and Islam, Marvin Olasky, editor, referred to *Allah* as not being the God of the Bible. He wrote, "Muslims say their God is all-wise and all-compassionate, but *Allah* merely displays man's understanding of what wisdom and compassion are" (*World*, 27 October 2001). This statement causes confusion. To say rather that the Muslim concept of Allah differs from the Christian concept of Allah, in my opinion, would be helpful.

Throughout Western history, many people have corrupted the term *God*. For instance, the Ku Klux Klan demeans, diminishes, and denigrates the English word God; yet, English-speaking Christians have not permitted such corruptions to rob them of their use of the term *God*. Likewise, the same is true for *God* in Arabic. Terrorists may misuse the term *Allah*, but they cannot rob millions of their word for *God*.

Perhaps we could better understand this error if we translate some of these judgments and criticisms into English. For example, some Christians might say, "*God* is not the *God* of the Bible." They also might say, "*God* is a demonic force causing murder," and so on. How can Christians then proclaim Christ to people who know of *God* by that term? If *God* is demonized, it also becomes impossible to encourage people to love *God*, to worship *God*, or to believe Jesus Christ is the Son of *God*. Would we be willing to give *God* a different term after centuries of using *God* in our language? Some are linguistically destroying the term

for *God* used by millions of their coreligionists in other parts of the world. *God* loves the world, including those who speak Arabic.

It is imperative that the term *Allah* not be totally destroyed in Western minds. Otherwise, even Arab Christians will be questioned as to their authenticity and worship of the one, triune *God*, according to Christian orthodoxy. Such linguistic destruction also threatens to harm relationships with Muslims and potentially arouses hatred. The problem is linguistic, not theological.

Arabic was spoken at Pentecost, a watershed event in church history (Acts 2:8–11). Its usage regarding the worship of *God* predates English. In fact, Muhammad may have borrowed the term from Christians and Jews of his day. A Washington University anthropology professor states, “*Allah* is the south Semitic version of the north Semitic Elohim...so that the *Eloh* and *Allah* versions appear to come from the same Semitic root.” Let’s exercise caution in speaking of Islam’s different tenets and not demonize *Allah*, who is found throughout the Old and New Testaments in the Arabic Bible, as is *God* in our English version. The apostle John said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with *Allah*, and the Word was *Allah*” (see John 1:1). We can join our Arab brothers and sisters in Christ who often say, “*Allah* be praised!”

-- Helen Louise Herndon