

## Surah 1. Al-Fathiha

1.1 IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE DISPENSER OF GRACE:<sup>1</sup>

1.2 ALL PRAISE is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds,<sup>2</sup>

1.3 the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace,

1.4 Lord of the Day of Judgment!

1.5 Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid.

1.6 Guide us the straight way -

1.7 the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings,<sup>3</sup> not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray!<sup>4</sup>

### Author Comments

1 - According to most of the authorities, this invocation (which occurs at the beginning of every surah with the exception of surah 9) constitutes an integral part of "The Opening" and is, therefore, numbered as verse {1}. In all other instances, the invocation "in the name of God" precedes the surah as such, and is not counted among its verses. - Both the divine epithets rahman and rahim are derived from the noun rahmah, which signifies "mercy", "compassion", "loving tenderness" and, more comprehensively, "grace". From the very earliest times, Islamic scholars have endeavoured to define the exact shades of meaning which differentiate the two terms. The best and simplest of these explanations is undoubtedly the one advanced by Ibn al-Qayyim (as quoted in Manar I,48): the term rahman circumscribes the quality of abounding grace inherent in, and inseparable from, the concept of God's Being, whereas rahim expresses the manifestation of that grace in, and its effect upon, His creation - in other words, an aspect of His activity.

2 - In this instance, the term "worlds" denotes all categories of existence both in the physical and the spiritual sense. The Arabic expression rabb - rendered by me as "Sustainer" - embraces a wide complex of meanings not easily expressed by a single term in another language. It comprises the ideas of having a just claim to the possession of anything and, consequently, authority over it, as well as of rearing, sustaining and fostering anything from its inception to its final completion. Thus, the head of a family is called rabb ad-dar ("master of the house") because he has authority over it and is responsible for its maintenance; similarly, his wife is called rabbat ad-dar ("mistress of the house"). Preceded by the definite article al, the designation rabb is applied, in the Qur'an, exclusively to God as the sole fosterer and

sustainer of all creation - objective as well as conceptual - and therefore the ultimate source of all authority.

3 - I.e., by vouchsafing to them prophetic guidance and enabling them to avail themselves thereof.

4 - According to almost all the commentators, God's "condemnation" (ghadab, lit., "wrath") is synonymous with the evil consequences which man brings upon himself by wilfully rejecting God's guidance and acting contrary to His injunctions. Some commentators (e.g., Zamakhshari) interpret this passage as follows: "...the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings - those who have not been condemned [by Thee], and who do not go astray": in other words, they regard the last two expressions as defining "those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings". Other commentators (e.g., Baghawi and Ibn Kathir) do not subscribe to this interpretation - which would imply the use of negative definitions - and understand the last verse of the surah in the manner rendered by me above. As regards the two categories of people following a wrong course, some of the greatest Islamic thinkers (e.g., Al-Ghazali or, in recent times, Muhammad 'Abduh) held the view that the people described as having incurred "God's condemnation" - that is, having deprived themselves of His grace - are those who have become fully cognizant of God's message and, having understood it, have rejected it; while by "those who go astray" are meant people whom the truth has either not reached at all, or to whom it has come in so garbled and corrupted a form as to make it difficult for them to recognize it as the truth (see 'Abduh in *Manar* I, 68 ff.).

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