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Anarchist Explorations of the Qur'an

Tasneem Project

30th November 2005

FATIHAH: AYAT 2

“All Praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds.”

Ibn Kathir says:

“The letters *Alif* and *Lam* before the word *Hamd* serve to encompass all types of thanks and appreciation for Allah, the Exalted. *Ar-Rabb*, linguistically means, the master or the one who has the authority to lead. *Al-'Alamin* is plural for *'Alam*, which encompasses everything in existence except Allah. *'Alam* is derived from *'Alamah*, that is because it is a sign testifying to the existence of its Creator and to His Oneness.”

Yakoub says:

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“This is the ayat that begins worship of Allah alone (*ibadah*) after bismillah. It encompasses the act of praise within the notion of celebrating Allah’s infinite power, a power evident in the majesty of creation, a power which unites every thought and atom in every universe as possessed by Allah’s act of Sustentation. Thus, in giving thanks and praise, the intimate omnipresence of Allah is fully acknowledged.

“One misconception that has dogged my understanding of praise and thanks is the idea that *ibadah* is grovelling, where God is the Mullah-King and Yakoub the prostrating insect. This is the upshot of a priestly class imbuing Muslim textual culture with its monkey-humping authority, beards gathered in hedging rows as they bluster to hide the naked contradictions and uncertainties of an *ulema* in turmoil.

“Such a religious leader is political in every sense of the word. But take courage, sisters and brothers. Reach beyond the words and explore the very physical shape of the text. See how the merciful teachings of ayat 1 and ayat 3 hug this second ayat just as a mother cradles her infant, the oft-recited invocation to *ibadah* embraced within the exceptional Mercy of *Rahman*. The physical text becomes metaphor.

“Who do I most often praise with a heart filled with mercy? Little children, of course. Therefore, perhaps I should give praise and thanks to Allah in the same way one gives praise and thanks to a small child. Not like some patronising politician, kissing and patting heads to win heavenly votes. Rather, engrossed, enchanted, listening with the whole self, my discontent stilled with love and joy and hope.

“In the traditions of Islamic scholarship, all kinds of ritualistic challenges have been erected as barriers to meaningful worship. Yet here, I would suggest the Qur’an begins by acknowledging the possibility of giving unconditional praise and thanks to One who is everywhere. In reading the Qur’an, then, the adventure is to continue exploring the multitude of ways it is possible to give praise and thanks to Allah.”

Allah knows better.