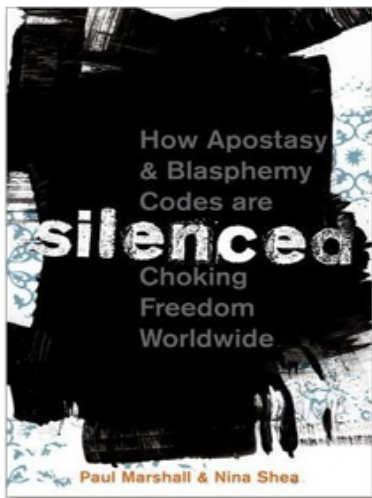




Major Publications in Europe & North America Highlight the Mortal Danger of Islamism and the Work of LibForAll

On November 4, 2011, Oxford University Press will launch a “comprehensive world survey” on threats to freedom of thought, expression and conscience posed by the rise of Islamist extremism in the Muslim world and the West. Paul Marshall and Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute’s [Center for Religious Freedom](#) co-authored the study, which features an extraordinary foreword by LibForAll co-founder [H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid](#) entitled “God Needs No Defense.” In this posthumously published work, President Wahid (1940 – 2009)—who was one of the world’s most beloved and respected Sunni Muslim scholars—articulates a profound, uncompromising and theologically rigorous defense of religious freedom.

The book—[Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide](#)—is dedicated to four Muslim champions of religious liberty, including both President Wahid and Dr. [Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd](#) of LibForAll. Its [North American launch](#) will be held on November 4, 2011 in Washington DC, in the Cannon House Office Building on Capitol Hill.



“The fatwa against Salman Rushdie awakened many westerners to the danger of being accused of blasphemy in the Muslim world. As this eye-opening volume reveals, accusations of “blasphemy,” “apostasy,” or “insulting Islam” are increasingly used by authoritarian governments and extremist forces in the Muslim world to acquire and consolidate power. These charges, which traditionally carry a punishment of death, have proved effective in intimidating not only converts and heterodox groups, but also political and religious reformers. In his foreword, the late Indonesian President Wahid observes that coercively applied blasphemy laws ‘narrow the bounds of acceptable discourse... not only about religion, but about vast spheres of life, literature, science and culture in general.’ ”

~ [Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide](#), “Back Cover,” by Paul Marshall & Nina Shea

“The fact that the Qur’an refers to God as “the Truth” is highly significant. If human knowledge is to attain this level of Truth, religious freedom is vital. Indeed, the search for Truth (i.e., the search for God)—whether employing the intellect, emotions or various forms of spiritual practice—should be allowed a free and broad range. For without freedom, the individual soul cannot attain absolute Truth... which is, by Its very nature, unconditional Freedom itself.

“Intellectual and emotional efforts are mere preludes in the search for Truth. One’s goal as a Muslim should be to completely surrender oneself (*islām*) to the absolute Truth and Reality of God, rather than to mere intellectual or emotional concepts regarding the ultimate Truth. Without freedom, humans can only attain a self-satisfied and illusory grasp of the truth, rather than genuine Truth Itself (*haqq al-haqiqi*)...



“Sanctions against freedom of religious inquiry and expression act to halt the developmental process of religious understanding dead in its tracks—conflating the sanctioning authority’s current, limited grasp of the truth with ultimate Truth itself, and thereby transforming religion from a path to the Divine into a “divinized” goal, whose features and confines are generally dictated by those with an all-too-human agenda of earthly power and control.”

~ [“God Needs No Defense.”](#) by H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, Foreword to *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*

Silenced also contains an important contribution by the renowned Egyptian Qur’anic scholar Dr. [Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd](#) (1943 – 2010), who was the founding Academic Director of LibForAll’s [International Institute of Qur’anic Studies](#):

“It is imperative that Muslims and Westerners alike free ourselves from the framework of the fundamentalists’ monolithic discourse on Islam. Otherwise, we will either misjudge Islam, by conflating it with the dominant discourse of the radicals—just as Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, in his video *Fitna*, mirrors the ideology of Osama bin Laden—or we will adopt an unrealistic and apologetic stance, de-contextualizing Islam from past and present circumstances, so as to convince ourselves that it is “purely a religion of peace,” divorced from the violence so often committed in its name.



“The first view maintains that Islam is evil, dangerous and incapable of being reformed. This “anti-Islam discourse” mirrors and echoes the Islamist viewpoint, which is thus taken for granted as representing the one and only “true” Islam. The second approach is equally unrealistic, presenting Islam as a well-defined ethical, spiritual and purely idealistic a-historical religious phenomenon. The problem with this approach is that it totally ignores the reality on the ground in the Muslim world, where radicals have often succeeded in donning a mantle of religious authenticity, and are rapidly advancing towards their goal of “welding” Islam to their virulent socio-political ideology.

“Rather than fall into the trap of either demonizing or idealizing Islam and Muslims in general, we must realistically assess conditions in the Muslim world, and develop a balanced, mature understanding of Islam itself, consistent with the needs of humanity and life in the modern world.”

~ “Renewing Qur’anic Studies in the Contemporary World,” by Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd, Chapter 14 of *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*

LibForAll’s Director of Programs for Southeast Asia from 2006 – 2011, [Kyai Haji Hodri Arieu](#), provided key editorial assistance and advice for this Oxford University Press publication. Kyai Arieu is a graduate of the renowned Pondok Pesantren Annuqayah (Madrasah) in Sumenep, East Java, and is currently completing his PhD. in Qur’anic Studies at Sunan Ampel Islamic State University in Surabaya. Descended from a long line of Sunni Muslim *ulama* (religious scholars), he also heads Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Ulum (The “Ocean of Knowledge” Madrasah) in Jember, East Java.



Kyai Arieu also serves on the governing board of Rabithath al-Ma’ahid al-Islamiyah Nahdlatul Ulama, a branch of the NU responsible for addressing the interests of its 14,000 madrasahs, which at any given time enroll approximately 3 million students.

NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

Just days before the launch of *Silenced*, Andrew McCarthy published a seminal article in the conservative American journal *National Review*, entitled “Islam or Islamist?” In this deeply reasoned analysis of the threat posed by religious extremism, Mr. McCarthy—a former Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who successfully prosecuted the perpetrators of the first World Trade Center attack in 1994—draws a clear distinction between

Islam and political Islam, or “Islamism.” In doing so, he explains the vital need for Westerners to distinguish between “supremacist Muslims striving to impose on societies a classical, rigid construction of Islamic law,” and “authentic moderates who elevate reason, embrace pluralism, and take sharia as spiritual guidance rather than the mandatory law for civil society.”

With this article, Andrew McCarthy has laid down a highly visible marker that will help bring clarity to the West’s struggle with Islamist extremism, while simultaneously discrediting the specious claims of Islamophobia directed towards those (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) who seek to marginalize and defeat Islamist ideology, *without* attacking the religion of Islam itself.

Islam or Islamist?

by Andrew C. McCarthy

“On the international stage, the LibForAll Foundation has just released an English translation of [*The Illusion of the Islamic State*](#), a compendium edited by the late Islamic scholar Abdurrahman Wahid. Once the president of democratic Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority country by population, the influential Wahid also led Nadlahtul Ulama (NU), the world’s largest Muslim organization, with over 40 million members. NU and other Indonesian moderates are clashing directly with the Muslim Brotherhood, arguing that Islamic scripture does not require the establishment of a caliphate or the imposition of sharia jurisprudence (i.e., *fiqh*) as governing law. Sharia, they contend, is a matter of private conscience....

“[B]ecause how we answer the “Islam or Islamist?” question critically affects how we respond to the profound threat posed by supremacist Muslims, we must answer it correctly... [Robert Spencer] is essentially saying that if it is not supremacist and political, then it is not Islam. That not only closes the door on any potential reform, it risks antagonizing pro-Western Muslims. There are many of them and they have no desire to impose sharia on civil society—even if they are less vocal about that than we’d like. Given that they nevertheless see themselves as faithful Muslims, I do not see what purpose is served by telling them that Islam is incorrigibly supremacist and political.

“From a tactical standpoint, we want such Muslims as our allies, and we certainly want to see them make inroads against the Islamic supremacists. That makes the Islam/Islamist distinction a worthy accommodation. It does not deny that classical Islam is the source of Islamism. But it does two important things. First, it identifies as “Islamist” those Muslims who hold to the supremacist and political aspects of Islam—and it is very useful for us to see those people for what they are. Second, it acknowledges interpretations of Islam that reject these political and supremacist elements: They are plausible, they are legitimately called “Islam,” and we want them to thrive. That is not a prediction of success, but it is a significant show of support.”

As one reader responded online to Mr. McCarthy, “A very interesting, thought-provoking piece. Bravo, sir. The “all Muslims are our enemies” crowd really needs to be silenced by rational, thoughtful discussion like this.”

And another: “I am deeply grateful for your exegesis on many levels. You have given me a modicum of hope, not in a sophistic sense, but perhaps in the *longue durée* where we reach a brief resting place firmly grounded in our common humanity, not in ideology driven by hatred.”



God Needs No Defense

by H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid

“While hostility towards Islam and Muslims is a legitimate and vital concern, we must recognize that a major cause of such hostility is the behavior of certain Muslims themselves, who propagate a harsh, repressive, supremacist and often violent understanding of Islam, which tends to aggravate and confirm non-Muslims’ worst fears and prejudices about Islam and Muslims in general.

“Rather than legally stifle criticism and debate—which will only encourage Muslim fundamentalists in their efforts to impose a spiritually void, harsh and monolithic understanding of Islam upon all the world—Western authorities should instead firmly defend freedom of expression, not only in their own nations, but globally, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“Those who are humble and strive to live in genuine submission to God (i.e., *islâm*), do not claim to be perfect in their understanding of the Truth. Rather, they are content to live in peace with others, whose paths and views may differ.

“Defending freedom of expression is by no means synonymous with personally countenancing or encouraging disrespect towards others’ religious beliefs, but it does imply greater faith in the

judgment of God, than of man. Beyond the daily headlines of chaos and violence, the vast majority of the world’s Muslims continue to express their admiration of Muhammad by seeking to emulate the peaceful and tolerant example of his life which they have been taught, without behaving violently in response to those who despise the Prophet, or proclaim the supremacy of their own limited understanding of the Truth. Such Muslims live in accordance with the Qur’anic verse which states, “And the servants of (Allah) the Most Gracious are those who walk in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say ‘Peace’” (25:63).”



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