

A Proposal For Islam

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By Admin-S

By policing religion, the authorities are not really protecting it. They are only enfeebling their societies, raising hypocrites and causing many people to lose their faith in or respect for Islam.

Mustafa Akyol, The New York Times

I am writing this column from an airplane, on my way from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to my new home, Wellesley, Mass. I'm in a comfortable seat, and I'm looking forward to getting back to my family. About 12 hours ago, though, I was miserable, locked in a holding cell by Malaysia's "religious police."

The story began a few months ago, when the [Islamic Renaissance Front](#), a reformist, progressive Muslim organization in Malaysia, invited me to give a series of lectures on Islam, reason and freedom. The group had hosted me three times before in the past five years for similar events and also published the Malay version of my book "Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty." I was glad for the chance to visit Malaysia again.

I arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Sept. 22. The next day I gave my [first lecture](#) on the suppression of rational theology by dogmatists in early Islam, making the point that this "intellectual suicide" still haunts Muslim civilization.

The second talk was on a more controversial topic: apostasy from Islam. I [argued](#) that Muslims must uphold freedom of conscience, in line with the Quranic dictum "No compulsion in religion." I said that apostasy should not be punished by death, as it is in Saudi Arabia, or with "rehabilitation," as it is in Malaysia. The practice of Islam must be on the basis of freedom, not coercion, and governments shouldn't police religion or morality.

It turns out all you have to do is speak of the police and they will appear.

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