

# INTERCEDE

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## The Islamic Law of Apostasy



The right to religious freedom, including the right of individuals to change their religion, is taken for granted by most people in the West. But in Islam, people are only free to change from a non-Islamic faith to Islam; they are not free to change in the opposite direction. All schools of sharia (Islamic law) agree that adult male Muslims who leave their faith should be killed. In line with this view, the majority of Muslim scholars, past and present, hold that apostasy from Islam is a crime carrying the God-prescribed penalty of death.

Likewise, for most ordinary Muslims today, across the spectrum of beliefs and ideologies, apostasy carries shocking and dreadful associations as a most abhorrent sin. In 2007, a study found that 36% of British Muslims

aged between 16 and 24 believed that those who convert from Islam to another religion should be punished by death. Even for modernist and secularist Muslims, apostasy carries negative ideas of treason against one's community. Apostates are viewed as traitors, bringing great shame on their families and communities. This attitude explains why so few Muslim voices are ever raised in defense of those accused of apostasy.

### The Legal Basis in Islam for the Apostasy Law

Sharia is based on the Quran and Muhammad's example, as recorded in traditions called *hadith*. In Islam's early centuries, these sources were developed by consensus (*ijma*) and analogy (*qiyas*) into rules and regulations set down in the manuals of the various sharia schools of law.

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# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

Jim Bennett

Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



I would like to share some new things that are happening at CMM. The Executive Committee of the Assemblies of God World Missions program has adopted a proposal to add new ministry opportunities to CMM's mandate. While we will continue to do all the current ministries of CMM, among the new emphases will be the opportunity to train church planting teams to serve among Muslim Unreached People Groups. The AGWM Executive Committee has provided a new name for CMM – *Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples*, fully effective Jan. 1, 2010. This issue reflects our new name and logo.

It is an honor for me to announce that Mark Hausfeld has accepted the newly created role of International Director. I have assumed the role of Director of Ministries and will continue with many of the responsibilities that I have carried for several years.

Mark and Lynda, along with their two daughters and son, served effectively as church planters in Chicago, then as successful missionaries in the hard soil of Pakistan – where they engaged in church planting and the establishment of Teen Challenge, and for the last eight and one-half years as Area Director for Central Eurasia. I want to extend a warm welcome to Mark and his family.


*From International Director  
Mark Hausfeld:*

Dear Friends of *Intercede*,  
Since 1984, the vision of our founder, Dr. David Irwin, and the mandates of both Assemblies of God World Missions and the Center for Ministry to Muslims have been to successfully equip the Church to reach Muslim peo-

ples around the world. The last year has brought Spirit-driven change, beginning with our new name and expanded purpose.

Our purpose is to equip the Church to reach Muslims and to mobilize church planting teams among Muslim peoples. Wherever on the globe we may find Muslims, including North America, *Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples* will be present by collaborating with all six regions of AGWM and US Missions.

This past year, I've travelled extensively throughout the world. In each place I have found myself with other Assemblies of God and local evangelical leaders. Time and again I have heard appreciation and thanks directed at the ministries of CMM. With the new responsibility of not only equipping the Church, but additionally of mobilizing church planting teams, there is an even greater anticipation of what the Holy Spirit is going to do in the Muslim world.

Please pray for us as we venture into the plan of the Spirit to touch the least reached of the unreached. 



*Mark Hausfeld and his family.*

# The Islamic Law of Apostasy

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According to criminal law in sharia, the state must impose mandatory punishments (*hudud*) for specific crimes that are supposedly committed against God and His rights. These *hudud* crimes make up a separate category in sharia criminal law, being the only ones to carry divinely-ordained punishments, which cannot be altered by humans. Apostasy (*irtidad*) is included in the list of *hudud* crimes by three of the Islamic schools of law; apostasy is thus viewed as a very severe crime for which God Himself has prescribed the death penalty. The other schools of law, though giving judges greater flexibility in cases of apostasy, still decree the death penalty for apostates.

## The Quran and Hadith

Given the unanimous rulings of sharia about the death penalty for adult male apostates, it is rather surprising to discover that the Quran itself, the primary source

from which sharia is derived, has no clear statement about the punishment of apostates in this life.

Apostasy is mentioned in 13 verses of the Quran, but the emphasis of these verses is on God's punishment of apostates in the next life. Here are some examples: *But if any turn away and reject God, God will punish him with a mighty punishment. (88:23-24)*

*Anyone who after accepting faith in Allah utters unbelief except under compulsion his heart remaining firm in faith but such as open their breast to unbelief on them is wrath from Allah and theirs will be a dreadful penalty. (16:106)*

*...and if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the hereafter; they will be companions of the fire and will abide therein. (2:217)*

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THE ISLAMIC LAW OF APOSTASY	THE DEATH SENTENCE FOR APOSTATES FROM ISLAM, ACCORDING TO THE FIVE MAIN SCHOOLS OF SHARI'A					
	School of law	Hanafi (Sunni)	Shafi'i (Sunni)	Maliki (Sunni)	Hanbali (Sunni)	Ja'fari (Shi'a)
	Sane adult male	Death	Death	Death	Death	Death
	Sane adult female	Imprisoned until she repents	Death	Death	Death	Imprisoned and beaten with rods until she repents or dies
	Period for repentance	Three days	Three days	Three days	Immediate repentance required	Born Muslims must repent immediately; converts to Islam are given time to repent
	Apostasy a <i>hadd</i> offence?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
	Must apostasy be spoken to incur penalty?	Yes	No - Inward apostasy is punishable	No - Inward apostasy is punishable	No - Inward apostasy is punishable	
	Establishing guilt	Two witnesses required	Even words spoken in jest are counted as apostasy. Two witnesses required	Ascertain whether the individual was previously a true practicing Muslim		Confession and two truthful male witnesses. Words spoken in anger, jest, and unintentionally do not count



# The Islamic Law

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Because the Quran is so ambiguous, the *hadith* are therefore the main sources used to justify the sharia punishment of death for apostates. For example:

*Narrated Ikrima: Some of Zanadiq [Muslim heretics] were brought to Ali and he burnt them. The news of this event reached Ibn Abbas who said, "If I had been in his place, I would not have burnt them, as Allah's apostle forbade it, saying, 'Do not punish anybody with Allah's punishment (fire).' I would have killed them according to the statement of Allah's apostle, 'Whoever changed his [Islamic] religion, then kill him.'" (Bukhari, Vol. 9, Book 84, No. 57)*

There are also *hadith* that promise a special reward in paradise for someone who kills an apostate.

## **Other Punishments for Apostasy**

The sharia also lays down other types of punishment for apostates. These include confiscation of property, separation from spouse and children, loss of inheritance and denial of burial in a Muslim graveyard.

In practice, the death penalty is rarely implemented by Muslim states today, but apostates are commonly deprived of all their civil rights. This practice is termed "civil death" in Egypt.

## **A Broader Definition**

In Islamic law and tradition, apostasy (*irtidad*) has always been linked to the concepts of unbelief, blasphemy and heresy (all combined under the term *kufr*), which are sometimes used interchangeably. In a sense, *kufr* is the main category, while apostasy, blasphemy and heresy are its sub-categories. Although apostasy, blasphemy and heresy are distinct terms in English, in Arabic *kafir* is often used to describe an apostate, a blasphemer or a heretic, and all three categories are closely linked, even interchangeable, in the minds of Muslims.

Although the term "apostate" (*murtadd*) usually refers to a Muslim who has officially converted to another faith, individuals who consider themselves to

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be good Muslims also may be accused of unbelief, blasphemy and heresy-as well as of apostasy, for reasons such as skepticism, atheism, or not obeying sharia properly. Some authorities list 300 different acts that could make a person a *kafir*, thus giving Muslims plenty of possible reasons for denouncing other Muslims as infidels liable to the death penalty. This process is known as *takfir*. In many cases, multiple charges of apostasy, blasphemy, unbelief, heresy and insulting Islam and Muhammad are brought against the accused, thus giving the judges greater flexibility in deciding under which category to define the crime and ensuring that the accused actually is convicted of something. A feature of accusations of apostasy and blasphemy is the way they are often uncritically accepted as true by members of the police and of the criminal justice system, who require little or no evidence.

## Sharia in Modern Muslim States

Although most modern Muslim states have ratified international agreements on human rights, they limit their validity by adding that the agreements are sub-

ject to the authority of sharia. Human rights and equality of all before the law are thus interpreted by sharia, which discriminates on the basis of both religion and gender.

Many Muslim states had secular constitutions at independence but have engaged in a gradual process of Islamization since then. Most have declared Islam to be their state religion, and many have declared sharia to be the primary source of their law. Many Muslim states have two parallel legal systems operating: the Western secular system and the Islamic sharia system. Although most states with a mixed system and a written constitution guarantee freedom of religion and equality of treatment to all citizens, in practice a Muslim who rejects his or her faith is often treated as if guilty of treason and liable to the death penalty even if there is no official punishment for apostasy laid down in the constitution or legal system.

In some countries, the state legal system has adopted sharia laws that enable official charges to be made

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within the state courts against converts from Islam. (These blasphemy and apostasy laws also enable the state arbitrarily to detain citizens who, for any reason, are viewed with disfavor by the authorities or by militant Muslims.)

Though official proceedings against those who reject Islam are rare, apostasy is punishable by death in Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen. It is also treated as illegal in the Comoros, Egypt, Kuwait, Malaysia and the Maldives.

Where legal provisions for punishing apostasy do not presently exist, the state or local authorities may harass converts by arresting them on various pretexts, such as public order offenses, or by framing them for other “crimes.” These practices also help to avoid any unwelcome attention from Western media.

Where state legal systems are not interested in such

prosecutions, or where they dare not prosecute for fear of condemnation by the West, groups or individuals within the society may act instead to carry out the sharia penalties. Islamic scholars and mullahs may issue *fatwas* demanding the killing of the accused, and families may use force and violence against the convert, which sometimes end in murder as they try to remove the shame that they feel the conversion brings on the whole family. In some contexts, mobs can be easily incited to frenzied attacks against an alleged apostate. Individual Muslims zealous for their religion and its honor may take it on themselves to assassinate the accused, believing that they are doing a holy service to God and Islam.

*We are grateful to Barnabas Aid for permission to reprint this article. In our next issue we will look at specific countries and cases involving the application of Islamic apostasy laws.*





# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.*



**Friday, March 5, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the country of Malaysia.* Freedom for the Christian community is growing even more restricted as the word “Allah” is under protracted legal review regarding whether it can be used in non-Muslim literature. Christians already suffer from encroaching sharia law.

*...for the people of Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo.* Money from the Arabian Gulf is driving a resurgence of Islam. New and refurbished mosques are found in most cities.

*...for the Muslims of Iran.* Iran is a nation of 66 million people; two-thirds of the population is below 30 years old. Christianity is opposed, Bibles are restricted, converts from Islam face potential death, and evangelism is illegal.

**Friday, March 12, 2010. Please pray**

*...for Muslims in Birmingham, England.* With one of the largest Muslim concentrations in the U.K., the city has over 100 mosques. Pray for Christian outreach currently going on in Birmingham.

*...for MMBs (Muslim Background Believers) across the Muslim world.* Pray they would receive true shepherding and encouragement from fellow Christians.

*...for the island of Zanzibar.* Located in the Indian Ocean, it is a part of the African nation of Tanzania. It is predominately Sunni Muslim, and radicals have carried out several recent attacks against Christians.

**Friday, March 19, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the country of Lebanon.* Christians have left the country in large numbers, and the potential implementation of sharia law is growing.

*...for the Muslims of Uzbekistan.* Christian witness is very difficult; the Uzbeki government has made unregistered religious activity a criminal offense. The government has complete control over the definition of religious activity.

*...for the people of Sudan.* Despite U.N. peace efforts, stability is lacking and persecution of Christians continues.

**Friday, March 26, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the continent of Africa.* Oil money from the Arabian Gulf continues to fund mosques and schools at a rapid pace.

*...for Muslims in Nigeria.* Pray that despite violence and radicalism, Muslims would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*...for Christians in Pakistan.* Cases involving “blasphemy laws” continue to mount. Trumped up charges regarding Qur’an desecration or utterances against Muhammad are often used as a basis for judicial persecution of Christians, often resulting in lengthy prison terms.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND  
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. – 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***





# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.*



**Friday, April 2, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the people of Kazakhstan.* Laws have been passed mandating severe penalties for any religious activity not approved by government authorities.

*...for Muslims in Canada.* Although only 2 percent of Canadians are Muslims, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the country.

*...for Muslims in the U.K.* In 1970, only a few thousand Muslims lived in the U.K.; now there are over 2 million.

**Friday, April 9, 2010. Please pray**

*...for protection of the Church in Nigeria.* Violence between Muslims and Christians continues.

*...for Muslims in Bulgaria,* which has a higher percentage of Muslim population than any country in the European Union.

*...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Muslims.* Pray for a genuine move of the Lord through this medium.

**Friday, April 16, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the country of Morocco.* No Moroccan church has yet been recognized by the government.

*...for the 9 million Uighur Muslims* of Northwest China and neighboring Kazakhstan.

*...for the country of Pakistan,* where extreme violence against Christians continues.

**Friday, April 23, 2010. Please pray**

*...for Christian workers and missionaries in Europe.* Pray they would seize opportunities to witness to Muslims that might not otherwise hear about the love of Jesus.

*...for Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in Iran.* Persecution continues to be intense as Iranian MBBs face consistent threats of death or imprisonment.

*...for Christians in Somalia.* Religious violence continues to be a serious threat after an underground church leader was recently shot and killed by extremists.

**Friday, April 30, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the church in Algeria.* Arson is responsible for damage to a new church building in the city of Tizi Ouzou.

*...for believers in Eritrea.* 2,000 Christians remain incarcerated without proper charges or due process.

*...for the Muslims of Africa.* With over 1 billion people on the continent, and 3,500 ethnic groups — the population percentage of Muslims is approximately 45 percent and increasing.