

UNDERSTANDING APOSTASY AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION AMONG FULANI MUSLIMS IN MAYO-BELWA, ADAMAWA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article presents the understanding of apostasy among the Fulani Muslims Mayo-Belwa Adamawa State and the entire Northern Muslims of Nigeria. It demonstrates the effects of apostasy in the region as witnessed over the years. Mayo-Belwa is a multi-ethnicity and religious community that often engages in religious activities such as preaching, naming ceremonies, burials, and weddings, encouraging individuals to disassociate from violence and disturbances. Sadly, the negative effects of apostasy have led to conflicts and violence among religions in communities. The ripple effects of apostasy are of global concern due to its threat to life. This article adopted the library and the historical approach as the primary and secondary sources for the collection of data. The qualitative research design was used to have better research. The qualitative data analysis was done through thematic analysis. This article used sample techniques and purposive sampling of 22 men and women, respectively, as respondents. Apostasy is seen as leaving Islam, rejecting the way of Allah, and abandoning Islamic religion after believing it for a long or short time, apostasy is grouped with other acts of treason that demand corporal punishment, such as reviling, rebellion, adultery, highway robbery, drinking wine, and theft. The article recommends that an interfaith dialogue centre be established to deal with religious issues and to promote peace and tolerance.

Key terms: Adamawa, apostasy, freedom, muslims, religion.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Apostasy can refer to reverting from the Islamic religion to (*nfidel*) either through action or intention, signifying an individual's withdrawal from the religion. It can also involve making statements of mockery (*istihza*), stubbornness (*inad*), or conviction (*i'tiqad*) (Saeed, 2004). Therefore, apostasy simply means renunciation, disaffiliation, abandonment, and defection from a former religion, encompassing the acceptance of contrary opinions to previously held beliefs (Patrick, 2009).

Freedom of religion is globally recognised as a means to foster peace and provide protection to religious groups. The right to religious liberty adds dynamism to religious communities worldwide. The freedom of religion entails that no laws should be established favouring a particular religious body, guaranteeing individuals the right to exercise and express their religious beliefs and act in accordance with those beliefs. All individuals are at liberty to maintain their opinions on matters of religion, such as participating in meetings, conferences, naming ceremonies, weddings, and other religious and social gatherings. This right extends beyond beliefs alone; it encompasses the freedom of thought, religion, and conscience. This includes the freedom to change one's beliefs and religion, whether as an individual or as part of a group within a community, in public or in private, through written or verbal pronouncements, as well as the ability to manifest one's religion in practice, teaching, observance, and worship.

Individuals who have renounced their Islamic faith face discrimination and social pressure from their immediate family members and the Muslim community Mayo-Belwa in Adamawa state. Their conversion is viewed as a betrayal of the faith and brings shame to both the family and the community. Although Islam does not compel individuals in matters of religion (Qur'an 2:225), the act of changing one's religion has resulted in various punishments.

Families exert intense pressure on apostates to return to Islam, threatening them with the wrath of Allah. Other families pronounce curses on the apostate, often drive them away from the family compound and declare them insane to avoid being responsible for their actions. Apostates may face severe consequences such as the loss of custody of their children, annulment of marriages, termination of employment, and confiscation of property by the family. They may also endure punishments such as dispossession, physical abuse, discrimination, threats, torture, disinheritance, hatred, exile, and imprisonment, inflicted by their family members or any Muslims in the community to whom the parents, guardians, or family members may hand them over.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Apostasy in Islam

Taha (2011) describes apostasy as leaving Islam, an individual can desert religion if he denies the truth after living for God through Islam for many years, and any person who engages in apostasy is the one who turns back or leaves the path he was going. The frequent use of this term shows that when a person believes and turns away from God, meaning that he was travelling on the path to reach him, when he experiences apostasy along the way, he diverts from the path leading to God; this action is *ridda*. This person is to be pitied for not being faithful to God's covenant, and as a result, he should be in a constant state of anxiety, indecision and tribulation which he could not bear. Apostasy could be a crime of injustice one committed to himself; this is also overstepping of bounds and committing wrongdoing of *Shirk*. "Do not ascribe divine powers to ought beside God, for beholding such a false ascribing of divinity is indeed

awesome wrong". This verse could be interpreted as whoever falls into apostasy sinks into a mire of unbelief.

Al-munajjid (2017) says apostasy (*ridda*) is an explicit statement uttered by Muslims, which makes them disbelieve or (*nfidel*) or do something that implies actions of disbelief. According to him, apostasy can be well understood as the belief that associates other things with Allah, denying Allah, denying any of the characteristics that prove him, or declaring that Allah has a son. Anyone who believes that becomes an apostate and disbeliever. Apostasy, in other words, involves insulting the holy prophet Muhammad and Allah. Apostasy in action, throwing the glorious Qur'an into a filthy place, doing what is disrespectful to Allah's revealed words, a sign of disbelief, to also prostrate to the moon and sun, or an idol. Apostasy by omission, not doing any of the prescribed rituals in Islam, or by totally turning away from observing them. Therefore, apostasy is a total renunciation of the religious belief system, a form of treason, renunciation and refusing to accept any part of Islamic doctrines; these acts are regarded as apostatising.

Azam (2007) says apostasy portrays the sense of turning away from Islam, having received the commandment of Allah. The act of turning away is a retreat from Islam faith to a new creed the apostate believes in; it is also a shift to another religion, an adoption of atheism and a lack of belief in any religion. These retreats from Islam are examples of apostasy. Qur'an refers to apostasy as withdrawal from Islam or withdrawal from the spiritual plane. The term apostasy is a clear indication of the abandonment of Islam after accepting it for a long or short time, and it could mean a retreat from the unbelief of Islam - which points out and communicates a warning to those who accept Islam religion only to later abandon it. He advises those who accept Islam to cling to it because it is the true guidance and authority; it is the way of living and life, urging Muslims to persevere as Muslims and die as Muslim believers. To deny the Islamic faith and abandon the religion after surrendering to the will of Allah, the person who does that is someone who turns back.

Apostasy in Christianity

The word apostasy came from the Greek word *apostasias* and *musha* Hebrew word for apostasy; both mean revolt, rebellion, defection, withdrawal, and falling away from the religion; this act is considered illegal (Buer, 2018). Christian apostasy is considered one of the serious offences against God. Both the Old and New Testaments stress the heaviness of this sin, and willful falling away from the religion is punishable by death through stoning in the ancient time of Israelites. The scripture also alludes that apostasy forfeits the salvation of a person's soul. Apostasy, in several forms like heresy and idolatry, has been a great challenge since ancient days. Jesus Christ felt this sorrow as he saw some of his disciples abandon him and his heavenly teachings for worldly materials; New Testament experienced divisions and rebellions of many followers; apostasy today is an ongoing phenomenon that inundates both the ranks of the faithful and the church (Slick, 2018).

In the Old Testament, apostasy happened among the people of God each time they forsook God to practice idolatry, or when they forsook the laws of God and engaged in a sinful course of life, this was a serious sin that always caused the wrath of God against them (Slick, 2018). "Stone them to death because they tried to turn away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deu 13:10). History reveals that the people of Israel often offends God by rebelling against Him,

committing idol worships and disobedience, their rebellion was severely dealt with, rebels including the adulterers were stoned to death (Garcia, 2022).

In Christianity, apostasy happens when a Christian renounces his faith in Jesus; when he abandons Christianity to join another religion; or when, while still a Christian, he is living in sin. There is no such thing call punishment for apostasy in Christianity. The unbeliever is free to accept Christ to join Christianity; this is because Jesus forbade us not to punish those who have committed apostasy on Him. Jesus said: "He that is unjust let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11).

If someone apostates from Christianity, measures are taken to restore him or her by constant visitation or follow-up, counselling, and evangelism. This teaching of Jesus Christ restrains both the clergy and the laity, the family, and the community from persecuting, punishing, or causing someone to suffer pain for abandoning Christianity. Leave the apostate to God; He shall deal with him. Hence, there is no punishment for apostasy in Christianity (Slick, 2018).

Bauer (2018) look at apostasy as a breach of faith and rebellion against God, a spiritual rebellion against faith which was delivered to the saints (Jude 3). "Falling away from the faith, let no one in any way deceive you, for it will come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction" (2 Thess 2:3 NASB).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This article adopted the library and the historical approach as the primary and secondary sources for the collection of data. Therefore, historical research is a systematic and objective study which examines and synthesises data collected to find out facts and draw conclusions about past events. This kind of research involves the procedures in which events and occurrences are evaluated to uncover what happened in the past; it gives opportunities for the current researchers to mount on the past and access wider knowledge of human behaviour; it launches people on the previous experiences who had gone through the process of apostatising. The fundamental basis for this approach is to describe how Fulani understands apostasy law and the nature of apostasy experiences. The article used Library materials because of the availability of books, academic journals, and newspapers that are closely related to the topic. The qualitative research design was used to explore and have better research on understanding Fulani apostasy in Mayo-Belwa through the distribution of questionnaires and interviews. This article used sample techniques and purposive sampling of 22 men and women, respectively, as respondents. From these findings, the researcher draws and analyses the Fulani understanding of apostasy.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Fulani Apostasy

Apostasy can be classified into two categories: those who apostatise of their own free will and those who are coerced into apostatising, with no judgment placed on such individuals. Regarding apostasy laws, apostasy is seen as leaving Islam, rejecting the way of Allah, and abandoning the Islamic religion after believing it for a long or short time; therefore, anyone who openly or secretly, written or unwritten, renounces their belief should be taken and killed like any other infidel, regardless of where they are found. It further asserts that apostates from their religion should die because they are considered infidels. The

basis for this interpretation relies not on a specific Quranic verse but on careful examination and interpretation of the verse (Zwemer, 1924). The law dictates that all the deeds of an apostate become null and void in both heaven and earth. The apostate must be killed, their wife must be separated from them, and they are denied any claim to inheritance.

Taha (2017) states that apostasy is grouped with other acts of treason that demand corporal punishment, such as reviling, rebellion, adultery, highway robbery, drinking wine, and theft. The commentary argues that the blood of a fellow Muslim should never be shed except in the case of forsaking the religion, committing murder, or engaging in adultery. Anyone who departs from Islam is seen as disobedient to God and his messenger, and they should be cut off, destroyed, or even crucified. A murderer found guilty of their crime should be killed with a sword, while an adulterer should be stoned to death. Another law states that an apostate should be imprisoned for three (3) days, and if they return to the faith within this period, it is well; otherwise, they should be killed. When a Fulani Muslim apostate, an exposition should be presented before them, as their conversion may stem from religious doubts or errors that can be clarified through the exposition. However, if the apostate is killed or dies in their apostasy, any property they acquired as a Muslim goes to Muslim heirs, and property acquired while serving as a public servant in the Muslim community go to the public treasury. A Muslim woman who apostatises will only be imprisoned until she returns to the faith. However, some argue, like Shafii School, that she should be killed, as tradition holds that the death penalty applies to all who apostatises, regardless of gender, as it is considered a great crime that requires severe punishment similar to that of men (Zwemer, 1924).

Reasons for Apostasy

Limitation on the Purview of Choice

One of the major reasons many people reject Islam is the limitation of choice due to a lack of proper religious orientation and guidance, particularly among the youth. For individuals living in the West, society is influenced by Western ideologies. Religion is often presented by conservative leaders who adhere to outdated practices that are irrelevant and unrelated to the modern world. These religious leaders impose restrictions on adherents, labelling certain aspects of modern life as unreligious and immoral. For example, some religious leaders view activities like music and dancing as taboo and discourage Muslims from participating, despite there being no clear proof in the Sunna forbidding such practices. The conservative Muslim leaders make it difficult and sometimes impossible for young Muslims to explore and express their talents and contribute to society. When individuals express their desire to do so, they may be labelled as apostates, which undermines respect for the leaders who present Islam as incompatible with the present era. As a result, many individuals choose to leave Islam and seek a religion that can accommodate and support their talents, while others opt to remain nominal believers (Dawkin, 1933).

Activities of Missionaries

Many believers in Islam hold the opinion that the high rate of conversion to Christianity is a result of the pressure exerted by well-trained and well-resourced missionaries who visit villages, towns, and cities and actively persuade Muslims to convert. The success of these missionary efforts can be attributed to various factors, including the provision of material gifts to those in need, job opportunities, access to food, and free healthcare. The primary target beneficiaries of these initiatives are often impoverished Muslims. Humanitarian activities of this nature can easily sway individuals to convert, as they are in dire need of assistance. Within the Muslim community, there is an ongoing debate regarding whether the materials

shared with new converts are genuine gifts offered out of goodwill or if they are given with the intention to coerce nominal Muslims into converting to Christianity. The argument suggests that the gifts are provided to ensure the survival of individuals rather than as a means to genuinely persuade them to convert (Saeed, 2004).

Political

This involves a political action of rebellion that is linked to a spiritual revolt against God. Throughout history, there have been numerous instances of kings, territories, and individuals engaging in political rebellion. Tribes, individuals, and communities have also apostatised on many occasions. Each incident reflects the intersection of political and religious problems. In some cases, individuals feel marginalised or excluded from political decision-making processes due to their religious affiliations. As a result, they may choose to defect to the ruling religion in order to gain popularity and acceptance. Sometimes, a candidate's religious attachment is reflected in their name as a means to win elections and gain power over their constituents. In such cases, the dominant religion determines the perceived suitability of a candidate. Many individuals change their religious affiliations solely to achieve their political ambitions without considering the spiritual implications of their actions (Cook, 2006).

True Conversion

This type of conversion often occurs from Islam to Christianity and occasionally from Judaism. In these cases, the individual who apostatises may willingly sacrifice or forfeit everything they have, including their relationships with family members or their spouse, because they have developed a profound belief and interest in their new creed. Such conversions are considered genuine because the individual made the decision on their own and chose to change their faith (Cook, 2006).

Marriage

Marriage is a major tool that often facilitates or promotes religious conversion, particularly in Muslim-majority or minority states. These marriages typically involve individuals of the opposite sex. Conversion through marriage helps individuals achieve objectives that may have been impossible to accomplish under their initial plans and legal status (Dawkin, 1933).

Apostasy under Duress in War

There are circumstances and questionable conditions that can lead one to defect to another creed against their will, often due to external pressures. This situation may occur, for example, during a defeat in a battleground where the defending forces of another religion's boundaries and territories provide support. Such incidents are more common in border regions, where a united front is formed against the opponent and the minority religion. Many individuals choose to convert to the majority religion to avoid suffering, torture, or persecution. Orphans whose parents were killed or captured by the opponents are often brought up in the religion of the opposing side. Mass conversions to another faith have occurred as a result of conquest (Cook, 2006).

Apostasy and Freedom of Religion

Religious freedom is indeed a fundamental right that allows for the peaceful and harmonious practice of various religions. It grants individuals the opportunity to freely profess and practice their religious beliefs, protecting them from being compelled to pay taxes imposed by the community or state based on their

religion. This freedom also extends to religious groups, enabling them to establish and maintain religious institutions, manage their own religious affairs, engage in charitable activities, and acquire and manage property (Saeed, 2005).

Religious freedom also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, financial assistance, place of birth, or education. It ensures that institutions can be established for the purpose of educating children in their own religious traditions, without discrimination based on religion. Moreover, it safeguards individuals from being compelled to participate in religious instructions, ceremonies, or acts of worship that are contrary to their own religious beliefs. It's important to note that religious freedom applies to every person, regardless of their citizenship or residency status. This means that both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and residents are entitled to the protection of religious freedom (Saeed, 2005).

However, despite the existence of religious freedom, there are instances where heavy restrictions are imposed on religious practices. These restrictions may vary depending on the country or jurisdiction and can limit certain aspects of religious expression or impose regulations on religious institutions. It is crucial to strike a balance between protecting religious freedom and addressing legitimate concerns related to public safety, social harmony, and individual rights (Saeed, 2005).

Restrictions on Muslims

Muslims are often persecuted and prosecuted more than their non-Muslim counterparts for holding specific beliefs. Some of these laws aim to discourage the promotion of false teachings among Muslims and the propagation of non-Islamic religions within Muslim communities. The objectives behind these restrictions are to (a) prevent the spread of religions other than Islam, (b) maintain the purity of the government-sanctioned version of Islam, and (c) ensure governmental control over religion and religious institutions. Occasionally, religious regulatory bodies request mosque supervisors to provide the names of deviant preachers, who are then prohibited from delivering any religious talks in mosques (Saeed, 2005).

Restriction on Non-Muslim

In Malaysia, Muslim countries and Muslim communities in non-Muslim states, it is not allowed for non-Muslims to touch the Qur'an or use certain Arabic words in publications or speech. Additionally, there are banned words and phrases, such as "Allah," "firman Allah," "qiblah," "hajj," "ka'abah," "hadith," "fatwa," "rasul," "da'wah," and others. These restrictions are in place because these words and phrases have specific meanings and interpretations in Islam, and the authorities aim to avoid confusion among Muslims by prohibiting their use in other contexts. Non-Muslims are also restricted from preaching and disseminating other religions among Muslims. The goal is to prevent the propagation of beliefs and doctrines contrary to Islam among those who profess the Islamic faith in a particular area. It is considered an offence to influence, persuade, or incite a Muslim to accept another religion. Furthermore, it is prohibited to subject a Muslim under the age of 18 to non-Muslim religious practices or to deliver or send publications concerning non-Muslim religions to Muslims, especially in public places (Saeed, 2005).

Effects of Apostasy

It is unfortunate that in some societies, leaving Islam for Christianity or any other religion can result in negative repercussions. Individuals who make such a decision may face disownment by their immediate

family and be ostracised by their community. The consequences of changing one's religion can include disinheritance, persecution, loneliness, and even death (Saeed, 2011).

In certain cases, charges of apostasy may be brought against the accused, and according to Muslim law, they can be subject to various forms of punishment, including death. Not only the individual who converts to another religion but also those associated with them, who are perceived as disregarding Islamic doctrines, may face the wrath of orthodox leaders of Islam. Changing one's faith is seen as an act of enmity towards Islam, and the punishment is often perceived as death, with the belief that the apostate will not enter paradise (Patrick, 2009).

Charges of apostasy have historically been used to suppress dissenting ideas from established religious or political regimes. Muslims who hold different views from the government may face discrimination, harassment, imprisonment, and the denial of civil rights. Converts may have their marriages deemed null, lose their spouses and children, and have their inheritance rights revoked. Many employers terminate the employment of converts, and some relatives publicly declare the apostate as insane. Families may resort to violence, threats, or pleas to convince the accused to return to Islam. In extreme cases, families may expel the apostate from the family or even resort to killing them. In countries like Egypt and Pakistan, converts have been murdered by enraged family members and mobs driven by religious zeal. Perpetrators of such killings often go unpunished as the government fails to prosecute them. In some cases, Muslim communities handle apostasy matters unofficially, without involvement from the authorities, due to concerns and unwelcome attention from the Western media (Patrick, 2009).

Some Islamic writers argue that penalties, including death, are appropriate consequences for apostasy because they believe that the public image of Islam is ridiculed and weakened by such conversions. They view apostasy as an act of mockery and misguidance to the pious. Tragic examples such as Mekki Kuku, a primary school teacher from Nuba Mountains who was imprisoned in Sudan in 1998 for violating apostasy laws, and Hussein Ali Qambar, a Shia Kuwaiti businessman who was murdered in 1995 for converting to Christianity, highlight the grave consequences faced by individuals who choose to leave Islam (Patrick, 2009).

Effects on Marriage

In Islam, marriage is considered a Sunna (recommended practice) and is a legal union between a man and a woman for life. It is encouraged for those who are financially capable. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that whoever is wealthy should get married. He also mentioned that a woman may be married for her beauty, wealth, noble descent, or religious devotion (Quraishy, 1987).

According to Islamic law, if one spouse decides to change their religion, divorce is required immediately (Quraishy, 1987). If either the husband or wife apostatises, divorce immediately takes place. However, if both spouses apostatise, the marriage remains intact. If one of them later decides to return to Islam, divorce becomes obligatory. The Hanbali and Shafi'i Schools of Islamic law advocate for the separation of apostate couples, while the Hanafi School holds the view that they should not separate. According to Islamic law, children born before the apostasy of their parents are considered Muslims and cannot follow their apostate parents in their new faith (Hamilton, 1985).

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Regarding the status of marriage among apostate spouses, the impact depends on the individual who apostatises. The Hanafi School differentiates between the legal status of marriage and asserts that the marriage should be terminated if the husband apostatises. They argue that it is not permissible for a Muslim woman to be under the control of a non-Muslim man. If a woman apostatises, her marriage is considered annulled naturally, and she may be regarded as a slave to her husband, facing the consequences of her actions (Muhrisun, 2015).

Effects on Property Ownership

Under Islamic law, an apostate is generally denied the right to inherit the property of a deceased Muslim relative. This decision is based on analogy, as a non-believer is considered ineligible to inherit from a Muslim (Jones, 2005).

Scholars unanimously agree that an apostate cannot inherit the property of any Muslim or non-Muslim. If the apostate's parents pass away, they have no right to inherit any portion of the deceased's property based on their new creed. However, if the deceased has left a written will allocating a portion of their property (not exceeding one-third) to the apostate, then upon the apostate's death, that property is considered (fai" and is given to the Baitul Mal (state treasury), rather than to close Muslim or non-Muslim relatives. This distribution is done after settling all debts and providing for the maintenance of the apostate's children and wife (Zahhali, 1998).

Imam Abu Hanifa further advises that if the apostate is male, his family relatives, wife, and children are the rightful inheritors of the wealth he acquired before his apostasy. However, any wealth and property acquired by the apostate after apostasy automatically goes to the Baitul Mal. Abu Hanifa also states that any property acquired by the apostate while still a Muslim is considered Muslim property and can be inherited by Muslim relatives after their death. The apostate is treated as legally deceased concerning their property. As for a woman who apostatises, her close Muslim relatives are eligible to inherit from her (Zahhali, 1998).

Muslim and Non-Muslim Implication

Freedom of religion is a platform for religious groups to coexist and share a common identity, aiming to promote peace and provide a space for unrestricted living. However, for Muslims, freedom of religion is seen as an idea from human rights instruments that contradicts Islamic values, laws, and norms and should be discarded.

This article explores how the right to religious freedom was marginalised in pre-modern Islamic law through the law of apostasy and the associated punishment of death. The potential for abuse of the apostasy law has been significant throughout Islamic history. The article challenges the belief that the death penalty for apostasy is explicitly commanded in the Qur'an or prophetic traditions. Instead, many of these laws were developed based on hadiths or analogical reasoning. In a multicultural and multi-religious nation like Nigeria, where both religions claim popularity, apostasy laws may only be applicable in Muslim-dominated states and communities.

Although the Qur'an supports the idea of religious freedom as an individual choice, Muslim jurists have largely restricted the scope of this freedom for Muslims when it comes to adopting or choosing a religion

or belief system. Once a person embraces Islam, conversion from Islam is not allowed or permitted. To deter conversion, Muslim scholars introduced apostasy laws with the death penalty as the most severe consequence, justified based on certain isolated hadiths. Joining Islam automatically makes an individual part of the community of believers, functioning as a united team and political unit.

Moreover, if an individual decides to leave the community of believers by converting to another religion, they will be excluded from the believers, and Muslims may accuse them of apostasy, disbelief, or heresy. In many Muslim communities, there are practising and non-practising Muslims. Practising Muslims vary in their commitment to Islamic commandments, prohibitions, and rituals, while others adhere to basic practices such as the five daily prayers, zakat, pilgrimage, fasting, and alms-giving. Some believers may prioritise certain fundamentals while disregarding others or irregularly practising them. On the other hand, there are nominal Muslims who have minimal affiliation with Islam. They may identify as Muslims, have a distorted or vague familiarity with Islamic practices when asked about their religion, and occasionally participate in Eid prayers or community religious activities. Nominal Muslims have little commitment to Islam, and apostasy laws were introduced to discourage conversion from Islam.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Apostasy, in simple terms, refers to an individual defecting or disaffiliating from the accepted religion of Islam and adopting another foreign religion or renouncing belief in Allah and embracing disbelief (*nifidel*). The law of apostasy dictates that anyone who willingly accepted Islam initially and later decides to renounce it should face the penalty of death, resulting in the nullification of all their deeds on earth and in heaven, and they have no claim to the inheritance. Freedom of religion, on the other hand, grants followers of any religion the right to practice, worship, and engage in religious activities without being challenged or harassed by other religions or government agencies. Such a community can live in peace among themselves. There are various reasons for apostasy, including marriage, political motives, missionary activities, limitations on freedom of choice, apostasy under duress during times of war, ridiculing Muhammad, denying Muhammad as the final prophet, and lack of faith in the religion, among others. The consequences of apostasy on an individual are severe. Many employers may terminate their employment, some may declare the apostate as insane, families may disown them, and they may be cast out from the family compound. They are regarded as enemies of Islam, and their punishment is death, with the belief that they cannot attain paradise. Apostasy also affects their marital status and ownership of property. The consequences often include loneliness, persecution, discrimination, disownment, and even death for making that decision. However, if the accused apostate returns to the faith, they are freed from these punishments.

Recommendations: The research recommends government intervention in matters such as punishment for apostasy to prevent the loss of innocent lives in the name of changing religion, as matters of religion are individual decisions. Freedom of religion and practice should be allowed without restrictions imposed by the government or dominant religion in a region or society. This alone can foster respect and unity among people of diverse creeds living in the same community. Furthermore, establishing inter-faith dialogue centres is necessary to address religious issues and related matters.

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