

Apostasy and Blasphemy

MPV supports the freedom of conscience and the freedom of belief of every individual, including the right to choose one's religion, to change one's religious beliefs, and to hold and express beliefs that others may consider blasphemous.

We believe that the classical jurisprudence regarding apostasy is incorrect. Not only is the doctrine of apostasy in direct conflict with the Qur'anic injunction, "Let there be no compulsion in religion," (Qur'an 2:256), it is also in contravention of various other passages of the Qur'an which discuss the person who believes and then disbelieves. For instance:

- Qur'an 2:217: "...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."
- Qur'an 3:86: "How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their belief and (after) they bore witness that the messenger is true and after clear proofs had come unto them? Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk..."
- Qur'an 3:90 "Lo! those who disbelieve after their belief, and afterward grow violent in disbelief: their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray."
- Qur'an 4:137: "Lo! those who believe, then disbelieve, then believe, and disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief, Allah will never pardon them, nor will He guide them unto a way."

As these several instances should make clear, apostasy goes without any worldly punishment, whether from God, the government, or other believers. If there is a punishment for apostasy, it is in the hereafter only. Given that, we uphold the principle that a person's faith is between him or her and God, and that every human has the right to negotiate her or his faith life according to the dictates of his or her heart.

Blasphemy is, in our view, similar to apostasy: freedom of conscience is guaranteed by the verse which states there is to be no compulsion in religion. It is further bolstered by numerous assertions in the Qur'an that no soul is responsible for another—thus while we should encourage good, and should disseminate what we believe are true teachings, it is not our place to force others to follow. Nor is it our place to punish those who believe differently than we do. Rather we are to leave it in God's hands to judge (see, for instance, Qur'an 2:113, 3:55, 7:87).

Perhaps most important, we have seen these principles put in practice by the Prophet and by his companions. The Prophet encouraged people to speak freely, and said that differences of opinion among his followers were a blessing from Allah (reported in Bayhaqi).

A famous incident involves the second caliph Omar, who was publicly challenged regarding his ruling on dowries. His response—rather than declaring the woman's position blasphemous, as we might see with those who challenge certain sharia rulings today—was to declare that he had been wrong and that the woman was right.

Without the freedom to hold and express unorthodox and blasphemous beliefs, faith has no meaning and instead becomes an empty exercise in conformity rather than the true expression of one's deepest connection to the sacred.