

# Up to God to decide on apostasy

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THERE are many views on apostasy and the punishment which should be inflicted on those who commit such acts including capital punishment.

But in Surah An-Nisa, verse 137 explicitly states: *Surely (as for) those who believe, then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will not forgive them nor guide them in the (right) path.*

Going by the verse, any sentences proposed by man pale in comparison to what God will do to the non-believers.

But only a few would go as far as calling for the death penalty against the apostates, as seen in Malaysia where only self-proclaimed *ulamaks* (religious scholars) and PAS leaders are harping on the issues.

However, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi's, view of apostasy may not go down well with these *ulamaks*.

His view is simple. As long as the apostates do not insult or attack Islam or the Muslims, they should be left alone.

Tantawi's clear-cut stand on apostasy should at least open the hearts of Malaysian *ulamaks* and leaders of Islamic organisations.

Surely, the current Grand Imam of Al-Azhar knows better about Islam than the average Muslims, including those who seem to be more interested in propagating the cause of their organisations rather than submitting to the *fatwas* of the learned scholars.

Tantawi, at a dialogue organised by Pusat Islam last week, said during Prophet Muhammad's time, if one renounced

**APOSTASY has always been a touchy issue with Muslims scholars and Syariah lawmakers alike, with some calling for the death penalty for apostates. But a grand Islamic scholar said it is for God to decide on the apostate's fate, writes WAN HAMIDI HAMID.**

thing would not infect (spread) others. When a person is in a state of apostasy, let Allah judge him," he said, adding that Muslims should always pray that they would die as Muslims as it was the best way to meet their Maker.

Tantawi's view on apostasy is well-rooted in the Quran, contrary to popular belief, as not a single mention of punishment, especially the death penalty, is ever mentioned in the holy book of Islam.

Tantawi, 70, is widely acknowledged for his religious background and studies, well-taught and trained in the fields of Quran and Hadith (prophetic traditions).

He had also served in Libya, Saudia Arabia and Iraq.

Among his works were the interpretation of the Quran, issues on banking and family planning and the subjects of *usul fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *Syariah* (Islamic jurisprudence and laws).

What Tantawi had said may not be legally binding but it would be a pity if Muslims choose to totally ignore the views of this prominent Islamic scholar.

While there is no papacy in the Islamic world but as rules of life are stated in principle in the Quran, views and opinions of the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar are something which should be given serious thought by all Malaysian Muslims.

The position of the Grand Imam of al-Azhar,

known as *Sheikh Al-Azhar*, was introduced in the 15th century during the Ottoman rule over Egypt. Although it was not known when exactly it was introduced, the Azharite historian Al-Jabarti mentioned the year 1690 when Sheikh Al-Kharashi died and named him as the *Sheikh Al-Azhar*.

Before that, the princes of the Mamelukes who were ruling Egypt managed the institution. Since its establishment, the position of the Grand Imam was filled by an Azharite elected by the Sheikhs teaching in the mosque.

The current Grand Imam, Tantawi was elected in 1996, the 43rd *Sheikh Al-Azhar* since Sheikh Muhammad Al-Kharashi.

As Quran is the sole guidance in life for Muslims, Tantawi as a great name in the tradition of the *ulamaks* surely knows better when his view was made in accordance with the holiest scripture in the Islamic way of life.

Of course, one may argue over the interpretations of the Quran but should the Muslims in Malaysia ignore the wisdom of the Al-Azhar sheikh just because his view is different, albeit in line with the message of God in the Quran, from the local religious scholars and political leaders?

For scholars, Islam is a faith that is based on persuasion rather than compulsion.

Of course, such a view on religious freedom is always scorned by self-proclaimed religious leaders and experts.

And they do it even though the Quran clearly makes no mention of any worldly punishment for apostasy.