

The Essence of Muallaf as a Zakat Recipient According to the Interpretation of Surah At-Tawbah Verse 60

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Abstract

Muallaf (new converts to Islam) are one of the eight categories (asnaf) entitled to receive zakat, as mentioned in Surah At-Tawbah verse 60. However, the essence and criteria of muallaf are not clearly defined, raising questions about who truly qualifies under this category. This study aims to examine the concept of muallaf from the perspective of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah by analyzing relevant textual evidence, including hadiths and Qur'anic exegesis. The research employs a library research method to explore and examine data from literary sources in depth. The process includes collecting, reviewing, recording, and processing relevant references. More than mere reading and documentation, library research demands analytical skills to produce systematic and meaningful findings. This study adopts a qualitative normative approach. Specifically, it falls under the category of normative Islamic legal research with a philosophical orientation, as it seeks to uncover and understand the core values and fundamental principles within Islamic legal norms that guide legal reasoning. The findings of this study, based on the interpretation of Surah At-Tawbah verse 60, categorize muallaf into two groups: Muslim muallaf and non-Muslim muallaf. The former includes: individuals newly converted to Islam whose faith is still fragile; respected Muslims who lead their communities; Muslims willing to strive and engage in jihad against non-believers; and Muslims needed to collect zakat from those unwilling to give. The latter group consists of: individuals expected to convert to Islam, and individuals whose harm is feared.

I. Introduction

Muallaf is a term in Islam referring to individuals who have recently embraced Islam or are in the process of learning the religion. Allocating zakat to muallaf serves the purpose of encouraging their steadfastness in the Islamic faith. Surah At-Tawbah verse 60 explicitly mentions muallaf as one of the groups entitled to receive zakat, as stated in the verse: "Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakat] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler – an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise."

This verse illustrates Islam's concern for both the spiritual and material well-being of muallaf. However, the essence and substance of who qualifies as muallaf remain debated among scholars, both in classical and modern contexts. Due to the lack of explicit definitions in the Qur'an, the author attempts to address this issue through a tafsir-based approach focused on Surah At-Tawbah verse 60, particularly regarding muallaf.

In Indonesia, the National Zakat Agency (BAZNAS) defines muallaf as individuals who have recently embraced Islam and require assistance to strengthen their faith in tawhid and shariah (Baznas, 2022; Lawang, 2022). According to the book *Fikih Zakat Kontekstual Indonesia*, muallaf refers to individuals whose faith is not yet firm after converting to Islam, and thus deserve zakat to reinforce their belief and protect them from returning to polytheism. The zakat serves as a tangible sign of the Muslim community's care, affirming that their sacrifices upon entering Islam are not in vain and that Islam values them highly—even placing them within one of the five pillars of Islam, specifically the third pillar (Ahmad Satori Ismail et al., 2018). These definitions converge on one meaning: muallaf are those whose conversion to Islam is still fragile and potentially unstable. Therefore, zakat is given as a form of material support to strengthen their commitment (Hasrun, A., et al., 2023; Ar-Rahmany, 2024).

The phenomenon of muallaf is further complicated by various social, cultural, and economic challenges faced by new converts (Zulfikar, A. Y., 2022; Lawang, K. A., 2023). Moreover, differing interpretations of this verse have broadened the discourse concerning the role and position of muallaf in Muslim society. Some commentators emphasize the spiritual and psychological dimensions of muallaf, while others focus on their political (siyāsah) and social roles (Ramdhani et al., 2023). Therefore, a tafsir-based study of Surah At-Tawbah verse 60 is essential to uncover the essence of muallaf as one of the core pillars in the zakat distribution system. This study refers to ten classical and modern tafsir works in seeking answers to this issue and aims to respond to the core research question:

How do tafsir scholars interpret Surah At-Tawbah verse 60 regarding the essence of muallaf.

II. Method

This study employs a library research design, commonly referred to as library-based research (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023). Library research involves a systematic set of activities including the collection of data from scholarly sources, critical examination, documentation, and the analytical processing of relevant literature (Mestika Zed, 2008). It is important to emphasize that library research is not merely limited to reading and taking notes from available materials. Rather, it requires the researcher to analytically process the acquired data through a series of structured stages in order to produce results that are both systematic and meaningful.

The research adopts a qualitative approach with a normative orientation. More specifically, this study is categorized as normative Islamic legal research with a philosophical dimension, as it aims to explore Islamic legal norms in order to uncover the foundational values and fundamental principles that guide Islamic legal reasoning (Syamsul Anwar, 2002).

III. Result and Discussion

The Use of the Term Muallaf as a Zakat Beneficiary

The term muallaf refers to individuals whose hearts are inclined or brought closer to Islam. They can be categorized as: first, those who have recently embraced Islam but whose faith remains weak; and second, non-Muslims who have shown positive inclinations toward Islam but have not yet formally converted.

The theoretical meaning of at-ta'lif is "to create familiarity" or "to foster comfort and harmony." Meanwhile, al-qulūb in this context means "souls" or "inner hearts," in line with the traditional Arabic use of the term qalb to refer to the center of belief (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984).

Offering material assistance is considered one method of softening the soul, which is regarded as one of the most effective and comforting means of persuasion. According to Tafsir al-Qushayri, muallaf are "those who are persuaded through gentleness. The objective is to foster attraction and enthusiasm for Islam. They are entitled to a portion of zakat as a form of approach and compassion, to nurture their faith and loyalty" (Imam al-Qushayri, 2015).

Thus, in terms of Islamic legal terminology (istilah syar'i), muallaf refers to

individuals whose hearts are approached and softened either to accept Islam or to strengthen their commitment to it. These individuals may not yet possess strong faith or may not fully support the Muslim community. The approach toward them serves to improve both their individual condition and that of their tribes collectively. Included in this category are tribal leaders such as Abu Sufyan bin Harb, 'Uyaynah bin Badr, and al-Aqra' bin Habis, as well as other similar tribal chiefs. This outreach was not merely individual but was also a strategic move to ensure socio-political stability during the early development of Islam (Abu Ja'far, 2000).

Based on the author's review of several classical tafsir books, various definitions of muallaf can be found. For instance, in Tafsir al-Baydawi, muallaf are defined as "a group of influential polytheists who have followers, and they are given (wealth) in order to attract their followers to Islam" (Nasiruddin, 2011).

In this context, muallaf refers to beginners in Islam with weak faith, including former leaders of the polytheists who have converted to Islam and possess significant social influence. They may receive assistance (from zakat or other sources) to draw their followers toward Islam.

Another source explains: "Muallaf are Arab leaders who were approached and given gifts by the Prophet (SAW) either to encourage their conversion to Islam or to strengthen their faith after converting" (Imam Abi Barakat, 2008).

It is narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that these individuals were a group of distinguished figures from various tribes who were gifted by the Prophet (SAW) on the Day of the Battle of Hunayn. They numbered fifteen in total, including Abu Sufyan, al-Aqra' bin Habis, and 'Uyaynah bin Hisn. The Prophet (SAW) gave each of them one hundred camels. Scholars explained that Ibn 'Abbas's statement implies that such gifts to the muallaf group were permissible in principle, even though the Prophet's gifts at that time did not originate from zakat funds, but from other sources such as ghanimah (war spoils) or fai' (surplus gains). It is also reported that Abu Bakr al-Siddiq gave to 'Adi bin Hatim when he came bringing the zakat of himself and his tribe during the events of Ayyam al-Riddah (the period of mass apostasy following the death of the Prophet) (Nizamuddin al-Naysaburi, 1996).

A different count was recorded by Ibn al-'Arabi in his book Ahkām al-Qur'ān, stating the number of muallaf reached thirty-nine individuals. Ibn al-'Arabi noted that Abu al-Qadhi Isma'il bin Ishaq included Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan among the muallaf, but Ibn al-'Arabi rejected this view, stating: "How could he (Mu'awiyah) be included in that group, when the Prophet (SAW) had already entrusted him with the revelation of Allah and the

Qur'an, and was frequently with him in person (i.e., assigning him significant prophetic responsibility)?" (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984).

Characteristics and Categories of Muallaf in Tafsir Studies

One of the main characteristics found among the muallaf is that they are influential community leaders (not ordinary people), so their conversion to Islam has a significant impact on their communities. If they have not yet embraced Islam, they are provided assistance to attract them to the faith; if they have already converted, they are supported to strengthen their faith.

A more substantive elaboration is found in Tafsir al-Qurṭubī, where it is stated that the term muallaf is only mentioned in the Qur'an in the context of zakat distribution. They are: "A group of people in the early Islamic period who outwardly embraced Islam, but whose hearts were softened by granting them a share of zakat due to the weakness of their belief." Az-Zuhrī said: "Muallaf are those who converted to Islam from among the Jews or Christians, even if they were wealthy" (Abu Hayyan, n.d.).

Some later scholars (muta'akhhirīn) mentioned a difference of opinion regarding their nature, saying: "They are a group among the non-believers who were given wealth to attract their hearts to Islam. They did not convert through coercion or war, but rather through gifts and kindness."

It is also said that they are: "A group of people who have outwardly embraced Islam, but whose hearts have not fully accepted it; thus, they are given assistance so that their faith may be strengthened."

Another view states that: "They are influential individuals among the polytheists with many followers, and they were given wealth so that their followers might be inclined to Islam" (Muhammad, 1993).

These views are closely aligned, and the common objective is the provision of wealth to anyone whose Islam is not yet firm, except through such giving. The muallaf from among the polytheists are divided into two groups: those who are drawn to Islam through financial assistance, and those influenced by leaders within their own circles.

A similar elaboration appears in Tafsir Faḥ al-Qadīr, which describes muallaf as a group during the early Islamic period, consisting of:

1. Non-believers approached with material incentives to embrace Islam voluntarily, without force or compulsion;
2. Individuals who had outwardly accepted Islam but whose faith and commitment were still weak, thus requiring material support to strengthen them;

3. Certain members of the Ahl al-Kitāb (Jews and Christians) who had shown interest or had already converted;
4. Prominent figures among the polytheists with many followers; financial support was aimed at influencing their followers to accept Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad once gave gifts to a group who had only recently declared their faith, such as Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, Suhayl ibn ‘Amr, and Ḥuwayṭib ibn ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, each receiving one hundred camels as a form of winning their hearts. The Prophet also gave to others, although in smaller amounts (Muhammad, n.d.).

This distribution occurred after the Conquest of Mecca (Fath Makkah) and during the spoils of the Battle of Ḥunayn. At the time, many Quraysh leaders, including Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, Suhayl ibn ‘Amr, al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, and Ḥuwayṭib ibn ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, professed Islam but still had weak and unstable faith. They were known as al-Mu’allafatu Qulūbuhum, those whose hearts were being inclined toward Islam. This giving was not merely based on economic need or prior service, but aimed to reinforce their commitment to Islam. It was thus a strategic and psychological act of ta’līf al-qulūb (winning hearts). The Prophet granted a hundred camels to major figures (like Abū Sufyān), while others received less. Senior companions such as ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and the Anṣār received nothing, as their faith was already firm. This reinforces the point that the giving was not a general right for all Muslims.

Ibn ‘Āshūr al-Tūnisī classified the muallaf and gave examples:

1. New Muslims with weak faith, e.g., Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb and al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām (from the group of Muslim al-Fath, those who converted after the Conquest of Mecca);
2. Fierce enemies of Islam, e.g., ‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl;
3. Non-Muslims leaning toward Islam, e.g., Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah.

The Prophet gave portions of wealth (whether from zakat or other sources) to these individuals to win their hearts, strengthen their faith, or encourage them to accept Islam. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī in Aḥkām al-Qur’ān, the number of recorded muallaf reached thirty-nine individuals (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984).

Tafsir Ibn Kathīr explains that the muallaf fall into several categories. The first includes individuals given wealth or gifts to encourage them to embrace Islam. For instance, the Prophet gave a share of the spoils of Ḥunayn to Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah, who was still a polytheist at the time. This had a deep effect on him, changing his attitude. Thus, giving to muallaf serves as a means of softening the heart, nurturing love for Islam and the Muslim community, and functions as a social strategy to reinforce the religion

(Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar, 1999).

In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and al-Tirmidhī, Ṣafwān relates:

Here, Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah recounts his experience during the Battle of Ḥunayn. He received gifts from the Prophet while he still hated him. However, through the Prophet's continued generosity, Ṣafwān eventually changed and became one of the Prophet's most devoted followers (Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar, 1999).

The second category of muallaf includes those who have already embraced Islam but need support to strengthen their faith. Material assistance was provided to help them stabilize in their new religion. This was exemplified during the Battle of Ḥunayn, when the Prophet gave one hundred camels each to leading figures among the Ṭulaqā' (Quraysh nobles freed after the Conquest of Mecca). The Prophet said: "Indeed, I give to someone, even though someone else is more beloved to me, for I fear that Allah may let him fall face down into the Fire" (Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar, 1999).

From these two categories, we can conclude that the Prophet's reasons for giving included neutralizing potential threats, as in the case of Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah who was initially an enemy but softened after receiving generous gifts and eventually converted. Another reason was the Prophet's concern for their salvation, as reflected in his saying: "...for I fear that Allah may let him fall face down into the Fire."

Tafsir al-Baghawī offers a more systematic classification, dividing muallaf into two main groups: Muslim and non-Muslim. The Muslim group is further divided into:

1. Recent converts with weak intentions, such as 'Uyaynah ibn Baḍr, al-Aqra' ibn Ḥābis, and al-'Abbās ibn Mirdās, who received wealth to soften their hearts;
2. Strong-willed converts with high social standing, such as 'Adī ibn Ḥātim and al-Zibrīqān ibn Baḍr, who received gifts to honor their status and influence their communities.

The giving to this group was permissible for the imam (leader) from the fifth (khumus) of war spoils or from fay' (wealth acquired without battle), meaning from the Prophet's own share, not from zakat (Abu Muhammad, n.d.).

The long-time Muslims include:

1. Those living on frontiers near non-believers, where Muslim forces could not reach them easily, and who did not join the jihad due to weak motivation or difficult conditions. They may receive support from zakat allocated for warriors (ghuzāt) or from the muallaf share.
2. Those who collect zakat from people refusing to pay and bring it to the imam; the imam may then reward them from the muallaf share or fī sabīlillāh (Abu

Muhammad, n.d.).

Non-Muslim muallaf are of two types: those whose harm is feared and those whose conversion is hoped for. The imam may give them wealth to ward off harm or to encourage their conversion. The Prophet used to grant such gifts from the “fifth of the fifth” (khumus al-khumus), as he did with Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah, seeing signs of inclination to Islam (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984).

In abstract, muallaf are individuals or groups who receive wealth strategically and conditionally from the leader of the Muslim community (imam) with the aim of guiding their hearts toward Islam or securing the welfare of the ummah. They are not passive recipients, but instruments of da‘wah, social stabilization, and Islamic geopolitical strategy. They are divided into two main categories:

1. Muslim muallaf, those who have embraced Islam, but for strategic or motivational reasons. Subcategories:
 - a. New converts with weak intention — given to strengthen faith.
 - b. New converts with strong intention and high status — given to influence their communities.
 - c. Long-time Muslims with strategic roles — such as living in volatile border regions or mediating in conflicts (e.g., among those who refuse zakat).
2. Non-Muslim muallaf, those who:
 - a. Pose potential harm — given wealth as a preventive measure.
 - b. Show promise of conversion — given wealth to attract them to Islam.

Regarding the continuity of this ruling among the eight zakat categories, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, al-Ḥasan, al-Sha‘bī, and others believed that the muallaf category ceased with the glory and strength of Islam. This is the prevailing opinion in the Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools. Some Ḥanafī scholars argued that the companions agreed this category ended during Abū Bakr’s caliphate when Islam was victorious and the disbelievers were weakened. Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Wahhāb stated: If needed, they may be supported from zakat. Many scholars assert that muallaf will remain until the Day of Judgment. Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah said: If you consider the borderlands, you will see a continued need for muallaf. Yūnus asked al-Zuhrī about muallaf, and he replied: I know of no abrogation on this matter. Abū Ja‘far al-Naḥḥās stated: This ruling remains in effect for those whose hearts need softening or pose a potential danger to the Muslim community, or for whom Islam may become good after being given support. In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, it is narrated: “Islam began as something strange and will return to being strange” (Abu Hayyan, n.d.).

Muallaf in the Context of Zakat Jurisprudence

In the context of zakat jurisprudence (fiqh zakat), muallaf are included among the eight categories of recipients mentioned in Surah At-Tawbah verse 60. However, scholars differ in opinion regarding whether this group should continue to receive zakat after the Prophet's passing. It is narrated that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Āmir al-Sha'bī, and a number of scholars opined that muallaf no longer received zakat after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The reasons they presented include the following: Islam had become strong and victorious, Allah had honored the Muslims and humiliated their enemies, and the need to soften the hearts of non-Muslims or tribal leaders had diminished because Muslims had gained authority in various regions. Therefore, there was no longer a need to give zakat as a form of diplomacy or socio-political engagement. This view is often associated with the action of Sayyidina 'Umar who halted the zakat allocation to the muallafah after the death of the Prophet (Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar, n.d.).

On the other hand, scholars who permit the continuation of zakat distribution to muallaf argue that they may still receive a share of zakat even after the Prophet's passing. The evidence they cite includes the Prophet's own practice of giving zakat to muallaf after the Conquest of Mecca (Fath Makkah) and during the Battle of Ḥunayn (in the campaign against the Hawāzin tribe), at a time when the strength of Islam was already considerable. These instances indicate that strategic considerations and the benefits for da'wah remain valid reasons for allocating zakat to this group. In certain situations where public interest (maṣlaḥah) necessitates engagement with influential individuals or societal groups, the ruling remains applicable and is not restricted to the Prophet's era (Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar, n.d.).

This divergence in opinion can be understood through the lens of ta'līl al-aḥkām (deriving rulings based on their underlying rationale or 'illah). If the 'illah (legal rationale) for giving zakat to muallafah is to strengthen Islam, bring hearts closer to it, or prevent harm from being inflicted on the Muslim community, then the ruling is contextual and not confined to the time of the Prophet alone. Accordingly, according to some fuqahā', the legitimacy of giving zakat to muallaf is conditional upon strategic needs in da'wah to reinforce Islam and depends on the political or security context of the Muslim community.

From the study of various exegetical sources and scholarly opinions, it can be concluded that muallaf refers to individuals whose hearts are approached with psychological and material means either to embrace Islam or to strengthen their faith.

This group consists of two main categories: (1) non-Muslims who show potential or inclination towards Islam but remain hesitant or unconvinced, including those whose

hostility towards Islam is feared; and (2) new Muslims whose faith is still weak or unstable and who require reinforcement to solidify their belief and loyalty to the Muslim community—or Muslims who possess influence over their people.

In practice, the provision for muallaf carries strategic, social, and religious dimensions, not merely based on their economic need. The goal is to promote socio-political stability, strengthen the ranks of the Muslim community, and prevent potential threats from within or outside. Those who receive such support are often influential figures in their communities, and their conversion to Islam may have a significant collective impact on their followers.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) allocated resources to the muallaf not only from zakat but also from war booty (ghanimah) or fay'. In terms of zakat, the muallaf have been explicitly recognized as one of the eligible categories (aşnāf) in Surah At-Tawbah verse 60. This affirmation highlights the importance of reaching out to muallaf as part of the Islamic da'wah strategy and as a means of strengthening the Islamic order.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of relevant scriptural sources, the study concludes that the Qur'an, particularly Surah At-Tawbah verse 60, does not comprehensively define the subcategories of muallaf. Therefore, the researcher examined classical exegeses to explore the nuanced meanings of this category. From this exploration, it was found that muallaf can be divided into two main groups: non-Muslims and Muslims. Among non-Muslims, muallaf are those whose conversion to Islam is hoped for or whose potential harm is feared. Among Muslims, muallaf comprise four types: (1) recent converts whose faith remains weak, (2) influential leaders whose conversion can encourage their followers to embrace Islam, (3) Muslims residing near or surrounded by non-Muslim territories, and (4) those assigned to collect zakat from individuals who refuse to pay it. There are differing scholarly opinions about whether zakat can be given to non-Muslim muallaf, with some arguing that it should come from other sources such as khumus (a fifth of war booty), or that no material support should be provided at all.

Thus, this study affirms that recipients of zakat under the muallaf category include both Muslims and non-Muslims, depending on their strategic importance in the propagation and protection of Islam. The Muslim muallaf are eligible for zakat based on specific conditions: to strengthen the weak in faith, to attract the support of influential leaders, to defend the Muslim community from external threats, or to serve administrative functions in zakat collection. In contrast, the non-Muslim muallaf may

receive support either to encourage their conversion or to neutralize potential harm and gain goodwill. This classification underscores the broader objective of zakat in fostering religious commitment, ensuring community stability, and supporting the strategic aims of Islamic da'wah.

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