

THE CONCEPT OF CHARITY IN ISLAM: AN ANALYSIS OF IMAM AL-QURTUBI'S EXEGESIS

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Abstract: *The Qur'an and Hadith emphasise the importance of charity (ṣadaqah) as the most noble way of utilising wealth in order to attain the pleasure of Allah and assist those in need, and it should therefore be practised by every Muslim. Charity not only serves to purify the soul but also contributes to the development of socio-economic sustainability and social reform that leads to the well-being of individuals and society, both in this world and in the Hereafter. Every Muslim must refer to the Qur'an and Hadith as the primary sources of guidance to ensure that their actions are in accordance with Islamic principles and teachings. This study aims to analyse the concept of charity in Islam, with particular focus on the interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to charity based on the views of Imam al-Qurtubi in his exegetical work, al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an. The research method employed is a library-based study, concentrating primarily on Imam al-Qurtubi's tafsir, in addition to relevant academic books and journal articles related to the subject. The study finds that al-Qurtubi interprets charity as the act of giving wealth in a tangible manner through direct provision. According to him, the meaning of charity is broad and encompasses various forms, including anything given to others, expenditures for one's own benefit, and spending on horses for the purpose of jihad in the path of Allah. He also explains that voluntary charity given by both men and women will be rewarded with multiplied recompense: ten, seventy, or seven hundred times, and even beyond measure ultimately culminating in the reward of Paradise. The significance of this study lies in demonstrating that the concept of charity in Islam is comprehensive, encompassing various forms of voluntary giving, including both material and non-material acts of benevolence, which remain relevant and significant in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *Charity, al-Qurtubi, Exegesis*

Introduction

Charity is highly encouraged and emphasised in various parts of the Qur'an and the Hadith as the noblest way of spending wealth for the sake of Allah S.W.T and assisting those in need. It should be a common practice for every Muslim. Through charity, we are able to share our blessings with those less fortunate and contribute towards achieving balance and harmony within society.

The concept of charity is based on the understanding that we do not truly own anything rather, whatever we possess is a blessing granted to us by Allah S.W.T, and ultimately belongs to Him. Therefore, when we give from our wealth, we are in fact sharing Allah's blessings with His creation. Since we are merely trustees of this wealth, we do not lose anything by giving in charity instead, we gain spiritual reward and the pleasure of Allah S.W.T.

Charity is a means of purifying both the individual and their wealth. Allah S.W.T says in the Qur'an: "Take *sadaqah* (alms) from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them with it and invoke Allah for them" (9:103). Charity is also a means of increasing one's wealth and blessings. Allah further states in the Qur'an: "Allah destroys *riba* (usury) and gives increase for charities, and Allah does not like every sinful disbeliever" (2:276). Allah also says: "That which you give in *zakat*, seeking the countenance of Allah, those are the ones who will receive manifold increase" (30:39). These verses highlight that charity not only purifies wealth but also brings spiritual growth and divine reward, as well as an increase in blessings from Allah S.W.T.

Charity is among the commendable practices strongly promoted in Islam. There are two main forms of charity in Islam. First, obligatory charity, such as *zakat*, and second voluntary charity, which reflects social responsibility, including *infaq*, *sadaqah*, *waqf*, *hibah*, and *hadiyyah* (Awang et al., 2017). Technically, charity refers to the act of helping those in need with the intention of attaining reward and drawing nearer to Allah S.W.T (Mohd Dasar et al., 2020). Charity is also a voluntary act in which an individual's faith and generosity motivate them to give willingly, without compulsion, in the hope of attaining greater reward and with the belief that Allah S.W.T will compensate them. It involves giving freely to one's immediate family members and relatives, as well as to the wider human community, including those of different religions. Furthermore, charitable acts may serve as ongoing sources of reward, continuing to benefit the giver even after death (Kakar et al., 2023).

The concept of charity in Islam is multifaceted, encompassing not only financial assistance but also acts of kindness, generosity, and social responsibility (Adeoye & Pristiwiyanto, 2025). Although the concept of charity (*sadaqah*) in Islam has been widely explored in previous scholarship, several important research gaps remain. Existing studies largely focus on general discussions derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, with limited attention given to in-depth analyses of specific classical exegetes such as Imam al-Qurtubi. Moreover, prior research emphasizes the legal and economic dimensions of charity, such as *zakat* and social welfare, while overlooking the integrated exegetical approach that combines linguistic, spiritual, and ethical dimensions found in his *tafsir*. The classical Islamic scholar and exegete, Imam Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 CE), offers valuable insights into this concept in his *Tafsir al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (The Comprehensive Exegesis on the Rules of the Qur'an). Al-Qurtubi's approach to interpret the Qur'anic verse on charity demonstrates a profound understanding of both the legal and moral dimensions of Islam, alongside a concern for their practical application within the community. This study seeks to analyse the concept of charity in Islam, particularly

through examining the Qur’anic interpretation of charity according to Imam al-Qurtubi in his exegesis *al-Jami’ li-Aḥkam al-Qur’an*.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach specifically utilizing content analysis to examine the concept of charity in Islam from the perspective of Imam al-Qurtubi, as presented in his exegesis *Al-Jami’ li Ahkam al-Qur’an*. A thorough literature review of books, journal articles and previous studies was undertaken to collect existing scholarly discussions on charity in Islam. The study further analyses Imam al-Qurtubi’s exegesis by focusing on Qur’anic verses and passages related to charity, almsgiving, and associated ethical teachings. The collected data were subsequently examined and synthesised in line with the study’s overall discussion. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of Imam al-Qurtubi’s exegesis, while also highlighting its relevance to contemporary discussions on charity and social development.

Biography of Imam al-Qurtubi

Imam al-Qurtubi is one of the greatest commentators of the seventh AH. His full name is Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad b. Aḥmad b. Abi Bakr b. Farḥ al-Anṣari al-Khazraji al-Qurtubi, as mentioned in the introduction to some of his works, including his commentary (al-Qurtubi, 2006). The name Al-Qurtubi is attributed to him because it is the name of the region where he was born, namely Cordoba, located in Andalusia (now Spain). Imam al-Qurtubi was born in 610/1214 in Andalusia. During his youth he supported his family by carrying clay for use in potteries. He was a renowned scholar known for his piety and asceticism.

Imam Al-Qurtubi is also known as a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with a broad perspective and a life of asceticism (Arisiana & Prasetiawati, 2019). He followed the Maliki school of jurisprudence, the dominant *mazhab* in Andalusia at that time. Imam Al-Qurtubi lived during the period of Spanish rule under the Muwahhidun Dynasty, approximately from 1232 CE to 1492 CE (the 7th century *Hijri* or 13th century CE), with its center in West Africa and Bani Ahmar in Granada. His father died during the Spanish attack in 1230, and six years later king Fernando 1st captured Cordova in 1236 CE, and many Muslims left the city and Imam al-Qurtubi left for Egypt. He preferred Egypt where many scholars lived although many people moved to Seville to study. He settled in Alexandria and after studying *Ḥadith* and *Tafsir* he moved to Cairo and then settle in Munyah ibn Khuṣayb north of the town Asyut. He passed away on the 9th of Shawwal in the year 671 AH / 1272 CE on a Monday night (al-Ṣafadi, 2000). His grave is located in Munya Bani Khausab, a city east of the Nile River in northern Egypt (Masykar, 2021).

Imam Al-Qurtubi is known as a pious scholar who was close to Allah S.W.T. Due to his asceticism, he willingly abandoned worldly luxuries to pursue the hereafter and seek knowledge, leaving his homeland behind. Throughout his life, Imam al-Qurtubi dedicated himself to everything that could bring benefit to his afterlife, thereby becoming a scholar with a broad perspective and highly productive in writing books that are beneficial to many people (Abdullah, 2018). Among the works produced by Imam Al-Qurtubi are:

- a) *Al-Jami’ Li Ahkam Al-Qur’an*.
- b) *Al-Tadhkirah Fi Ahwal Al-Mawta wa Umur Al-Akhirah*.
- c) *Al-Tadhkirah Fi Afḍal Al-Adhkar*.
- d) *Syarh Al-Taqaṣṣi*.
- e) *Al-Asna Fi Syarh Asma’illah Al-Husna*.

- f) Al-I'lam bi ma fi Din Al-Naşara min Al-Mafasid wa Al-Awham wa Izhar.
- g) Mahasin Din Al-Islam.
- h) Qam'u Al-Harş bi Al-Zuhdi wa Al-Qana'ah.
- i) Risalah fi Alqam Al-Hadith.
- j) Kitab Al-Aqdiyyah.
- k) Al-Mişbah fi Al-Jam'i Baina Al-Af'al wa Al-şahihah.
- l) Al-Muqtabas fi Syarh Muwaţta' Malik bin Anas.
- m) Al-Luma' fi Syarh Al-'Ishrinat Al-Nabawiyyah.

There is no denying Imam al-Qurṭubi contribution to the Islamic scientific tradition, particularly in the field of Qur'anic commentary. Several academics commend his *tafsir* since it has a significant impact on Islam's community. For instance, Ibn Taimiyyah said that there are numerous excellent *tafsir*, but *tafsir*'s Imam al-Qurṭubi is the best one that is most in line with the Sunnah and the people of the book from *bid'ah*-related issues (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980). The book of exegesis *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (The Compendium of Legal Ruling of the Quran) is Imam Al-Qurṭubi's most phenomenal work because it is the most comprehensive book discussing *fiqh* law at that time. The steps he took in interpreting the Qur'an in the book *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* are as follows:

- a) Mentioning the special features and virtues of the surah of the Qur'an to be discussed
- b) Mentioning other names of the surah to be discussed, including *asbab al-nuzul* and legal analysis of the verse if any
- c) Including evidence and arguments in the form of related verses and *hadiths*
- d) Analysing the verses from a linguistic perspective and using Arabic poetry as a reference
- e) Mentioning the opinions of scholars related to the legal rulings contained in the verses
- f) Discuss the opinions of the scholars mentioned, along with their respective arguments. Then Imam Al-Qurṭubi performs *tarjih*, which is choosing the opinion that is considered the strongest and most correct

Imam al-Qurṭubi's Views on Charity

The following is an interpretation on the concept of charity from Imam al-Qurṭubi's views in his *tafsir Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (The Compendium of Legal Ruling of the Quran).

Definition of Charity

Allah S.W.T mentioned in the Qur'an that the pious man who is believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what He have provided for them (2:3). Based on the verse, Imam al-Qurṭubi (2006) defined charity means 'to bring something out'. He said 'spending' is to give out money with the hand. The verb *nafaqa*, with regard to a sale, means to transfer money from the hand of the seller to the hand of the buyer. *Nafaqa* is used for an animal when its life leaves it. From the same root comes *nafiq*, the second entrance of the hole of the jerboa from which it emerges when it is attacked from the other entrance. Also, the word *munafiq* (hypocrite), so called because he leaves belief or belief leaves his heart. *Nayfaq* is used for trousers because the legs emerge from them. According to him, *nafaqa* is also used for something which is spent, used up or comes to an end. An example of that usage is in the words of Allah:

(قُلْ لَوْ أَنْتُمْ تَمْلِكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي إِذًا لَأَمْسَكْتُمْ خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ قَتُورًا)

You would still hold back out of the fear it would run out (*infaq*).'

(17:100).

Based on the interpretation of Imam al-Qurtubi, charity in Islam encompasses more than the simple act of giving wealth. Rooted in the Qur'anic description in Qur'an (2:3), it signifies the act of bringing something forth and releasing it from one's possession for the sake of Allah. The linguistic variations of *nafaqa* further highlight meanings such as transfer, expenditure, depletion, and even exit, all of which reinforce the idea of letting go. Thus, charity reflects both a physical act of giving and a deeper spiritual commitment, where wealth is willingly expended as a sign of faith, sincerity, and devotion to Allah.

Spending Wealth

The verse from the Qur'an saying; "The alms are surely only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to administer alms and for those whose hearts have been recently reconciled to the faith and for captives and for those burdened with debts, and (to be spent) for the cause of Allah and for the wayfarers [stranded on the way]. (Such ordinance is) a duty enjoined by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise." (9:60). From this verse, Al-Qurtubi (2006) asserts that the word *sadaqa* refers to the mandatory charity or *zakat* that is specifically given to eight types of recipients, who are the poor, the needy, *zakah* collector, newly converts, for freeing the slave, those in debts, those who are in the term of pursuing something for the cause of Allah and the stranded travellers.

In Islam, when we are given wealth, it is compulsory to spend it, either to ourselves or to the others especially the needy in the society. Otherwise, Allah S.W.T will destroy those who hold their property from spending as Allah said:

﴿وَأَنْفَقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

Meaning: And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good.

(2:195)

The verse above warns against actions that lead to one's own ruin. Al-Zajjaj and other scholars explained that withholding spending constitutes disobedience to Allah S.W.T and results in destruction. It has also been interpreted as a prohibition against clinging to wealth, since it will inevitably pass to others through inheritance, leaving its owner deprived of its benefit. Another interpretation emphasises that withholding wealth causes a person to lose both its worldly benefit and the spiritual reward associated with charitable giving in the Hereafter. Furthermore, the verse is understood to forbid spending from unlawful sources, as this will ultimately bring harm and destruction upon the individual. A similar meaning is reported from 'Ikrimah, who related it to another verse: "Do not have recourse to bad things when you give" (2:267). Thus, the verse carries a general meaning that encompasses all of these interpretations, as indicated by the breadth of its expression (Al-Qurtubi, 2006).

According to Imam al-Qurtubi (2006), spending wealth is sometimes mandatory and sometimes recommended according to whether *jihad* is obligatory individually or not. Allah S.W.T commands His slaves to spend from what He has provided them with and blessed them by and warns them against withholding from spending until a day comes on which it is not possible to buy or sell or obtain maintenance. It is as He says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعَ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةَ وَلَا شَفَاعَةَ
وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

Meaning: O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange and no friendship and no intercession. And the disbelievers - they are the wrongdoers.

(2:254)

﴿وَأَنْفِقُوا مِنْ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ
قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ﴾

Meaning: He says, “My Lord, if only You would give me a little more time so that I can give *sadaqah*.

(63:10)

The responsibility of mankind on his fellow beings does not necessarily stop on zakat alone, there are other responsibilities expected of mankind to assist people in need. In order to achieve its ideal of economic justice, Islam demand from all its followers to spend their wealth freely on the common good of society (Abba & Ngah, 2020).

Reward of Spending Wealth

There is an elision in the Arabic text which implies: “The metaphor of the spending of those who spend...” or “The metaphor of those who spend their wealth is like a farmer who plants his crop of grain in the earth,” meaning that it produces seven ears, each containing one hundred grains. Thus, Allah S.W.T likens the one who gives *sadaqah* to a cultivator and likens the *sadaqah* to grain prepared for sowing. Accordingly, for every act of *sadaqah*, Allah grants the giver the reward of seven hundred good deeds (2:261). This metaphor clearly illustrates that a single good action may be rewarded with seven hundred good deeds. As explained by Al-Qurṭubī (2006), the imagery emphasises the immense multiplication of reward for charitable giving.

Scholars however, differ regarding the meaning of the phrase, “Allah gives multiplied increase to whom He wills.” One group maintains that it refers specifically to the seven-hundred-fold multiplication mentioned in the verse and does not imply any increase beyond that. Another group of scholars holds that the phrase indicates Allah’s ability to multiply the reward even beyond seven hundred times, according to His will. Imam al-Qurṭubī (2006) considers this latter interpretation to be the stronger view, based on *Hadiths* which affirm the possibility of even greater multiplication of reward.

Furthermore, those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah will receive their reward in full, particularly when they do not follow their charity with reminders of their generosity or with any form of insult or harm towards the recipient (2:262). This highlights that the sincerity and ethical conduct accompanying charity are essential conditions for attaining its complete reward. For such an action would invalidate the *sadaqah* as Allah tells us in the verse:

﴿قَوْلٌ مَعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَدَىٰ وَاللَّهُ عَنِّي حَلِيمٌ﴾

Meaning: Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And Allah is Free of need and forbearing.

(2:263)

Purifying Oneself and Wealth

“Take (part) of their wealth to charity (zakat), so you would cleanse them (of sins) and purify them (of bad manners) and pray for them; surely your prayer is a relief to them (mercifully), and Allah SWT is Hearing and Knowing.” (9: 103). Al-Qurtubi (2006) interpreted that the word *sadaqah* in that verse is derived from the word *assodaq* (affirming). It is a postulation of the truthfulness of faith, from within and the outside. This is because the *munafiq* (hypocrites) would never abide by the commandment of *zakat* and alms, because they only profess or self-proclaim to have faith, but the truth is they are not faithful on the inside. It is a different case for true believers as they both profess their faith and give *zakat* and alms as Allah says: “Indeed, mankind was created anxious: When evil touches him, impatient. And when good touches him, withholding (of it). Except the observers of prayer. Those who are constant in their prayer. And those within whose wealth is a known right. For the petitioner and the deprived.” (70: 19- 25). Al-Qurtubi (2006) argued that the meaning of ‘know right’ in this verse is referring to *zakat* to be paid by every Muslim. This is because the obligated *zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam. Imam al-Qurtubi had said that among the advantages of paying *zakat* is it can create a positive connection between the giver and the receiver.

Social Responsibility

Charity transcends the boundaries of cultural, ethnic, religious discrimination and is rather regulated through an objective criterion by means of which emotional, economic and political interest are dismissed in the giving process (Bensaid et al, 2013). According to Imam al-Qurtubi (2006) giving charity to the non-Muslims are permitted. As for *zakat*, it is not permitted to give it to an unbeliever since the Prophet S.A.W said, ‘I was commanded to take *sadaqah* (meaning here *zakat*) from your rich and give it to your poor’ (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al- Bukhari, *kitab al-zakat*, no 1395), because *zakat* on livestock and money is an obligatory purification and may not be given to unbelievers. Allah says:

﴿وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا﴾

Meaning: And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive

(8: 18)

A captive in Islam can only be an idolater. So, the literal meaning of this verse allows *sadaqah* to be given to non-Muslims and, non-Muslims can be given voluntary *sadaqah* if they are needy, and Allah knows best (al-Qurtubi, 2006). In this regard, the general meaning of the verse that charity is about kindness, feeding people and general *sadaqah*.

According to Imam Al-Qurtubi (2006), the most excellent form of charity is that which is given from the finest and most valuable possessions owned by a person. This reflected to the saying of Allah in Quran: “By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love, and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it”. (3: 93).

In Islam, provision of charity is a duty on the individual of the community and on the state. This idea could deduce both from the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet peace been upon Him. Charity aims at relieving the deprived and the destituted of their needs and wants so that not a single member of society remains unprovided in his basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, medicine and education (Abba & Ngah, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Imam al-Qurṭubi defined charity as ‘to bring something out’ means for something which is spent, used up or comes to an end. The significant of study demonstrates that the concept of charity is broader, and it is an essential practice for both individual purification and social justice, providing a means of bridging gaps between the rich and the poor, and ensuring a balanced distribution of resources within the community. The component on charitable giving comprises many forms of voluntary charitable giving, including both material and non-material acts of kindness, which remain significant in the current world. While giving charitable act, Islam has guided some ethical values that must be followed by Muslims to get reward from Allah SWT. Imam Al-Qurṭubi’s insights remind us that charity is not just an act of giving, but an ongoing responsibility that requires sincerity, humility, and a commitment to the welfare of others. Through his interpretation of the Qur’anic verses, Imam Al-Qurṭubi helps readers understand how charity can be integrated into a broader Islamic ethical framework that emphasizes compassion, social equity, and the purification of the soul. The study also shows that charity not only for spiritual purification but also to build socioeconomic sustainability and social reforms that result in the well-being of an individual and society in this world and hereafter.

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