

ASIAN  
HORIZONS

Vol. 13, No. 4, December 2019

Pages: 577-590

## ABYSSINIAN MIGRATION

### A Model of Inter-religious Co-existence of Early Islam Based on Dialogue in Relation to Second Vatican Council's Document *Nostra Aetate*

Roy Vettikuzhiyil Joseph, Emanuel Gerrit Singgih  
and Abdul Wahid♦  
*Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

#### Abstract

We are living in a pluralistic society where many religions and beliefs are mingled extensively. It is important for us to live in harmony with other religions in the world. This paper aims at analysing the historical

---

♦**Roy Vettikuzhiyil Joseph**, a Catholic priest belonging to Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, is a Ph.D. candidate at ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies), Program Pascasarjana, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He holds a Master's in Islamic History from Maharaja's College, Ernakulum, Kerala and a Licentiate in Philosophy from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. His research interests include Islamic studies and religious conservatism. He has many articles to his credit. Email: royvetticmi@yahoo.co.in

**Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, PhD** is a professor of theology, philosophy and contextualization at the Theology Faculty of Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta since 1985. He was dean of the faculty. He is a member of Yogyakarta Society for Science and Religion and the Indonesian Biblical Bachelor Association. He obtained his PhD from the University of Glasgow, England. Many articles and books are attached to his credit as author and editor. Email: gerrit@staff.ukdw.ac.id

**Abdul Wahid, Ph.D**, is a teaching staff at the Department of History, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He earned his bachelor's and master's degree from Gadjah Mada; obtained his MPhil from University Leiden, and PhD from Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His area of expertise is History and archaeology. There are many books and numerous articles to his credit. Email: kang\_ahid@ugm.ac.id

*Note:* We, the authors, acknowledge the financial support extended to us by United Board Foundation for Christian Higher Education in Asia and Institute of Missiology Missio for the accomplishment of this research endeavour.

Islamic migration to Abyssinia, a Christian country, which took place in 615 AD. The Abyssinian model is helpful in moulding an interreligious harmonious life. Through this paper, we have made an attempt to connect Abyssinian migration and the dialogical process which led to safe co-existence of Muslims in Abyssinia with the Catholic Church's concept of interreligious life based on Second Vatican Council's document on the relationship of Church to Non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*). The common factor which binds both Christians and Islam is analysed and made as a base for further development. The emphasis on the concept of 'ray of truth' in other religions in the Second Vatican Council is also examined in the context of Abyssinian migration. The paper ends with the Second Vatican Council's plea for promoting and safeguarding the values like social justice, moral values, peace and freedom for a better tomorrow. Being the largest and second largest religions in the world, Christianity and Islam can contribute a lot to the world through its peace building by mutual dialogue and co-existence. If we take these examples seriously into account, then a multi-religious pluralistic society is possible.

**Keywords:** Abyssinia, Catholic Church, Islam, Muhammad, Negus, *Nostra Aetate*, Quraysh, Second Vatican Council

## Introduction

Human beings are always on movement. Human history is not a static one, but ever moving one. As one of the greatest Greek philosophers Heraclitus opined, "the nature is in a state of constant flux."<sup>1</sup> This is very true of human beings too. Every second we are making one or another type of movement. In this paper, we would like to make a study on an important movement which the early Islam made in its infancy stage, which is the first migration of Islam to a Christian Kingdom, Abyssinia, in 615 AD. It is situated in the present-day Ethiopia.

Today, migration has become one of the hottest issues in the world. A large number of articles and scholarly works have been published on this issue. For example, on Muslim migration to America and other European countries. How do they perceive these migrations? The recent ban on migration of the Muslims of certain countries to USA brings the clear picture of apprehension and prejudice on them. Another relevant and recent issue is that of Rohingya refugees. They were forced to leave their existing country. There may be many reasons behind such actions. But in this paper, we would like to examine the migration that took place peacefully during the time of

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://philosophyforchange.worldpress.com/2008/04/07/Heraclitus-on-change>

Prophet Muhammad. The first migration of Islam was to a Christian dominated country which is seldom discussed in the intellectual forums.

When we speak about migration in Islam, the picture comes to our mind is that of the great migration that took place in the life of Prophet Muhammad in 622 AD from Mecca to Medina, which is commonly known as Hijra. But it is also important to know the significance of the Abyssinian migration in 615 AD by the adherents of Prophet Muhammad. If Christianity is the largest religion in the world, Islam occupies the second place. Therefore, the relationship between the members of these two religions can influence the peace of the world to a great extent. From the beginning of the Islam, we see tension between Islam and Christianity. As Mahmud Ayoub, professor at Temple University, observes, despite the Quran's call for respect for Jews and Christians, most Muslims have condemned Christians as polytheists over the ages while Christians have seen Islam as a religion inspired by the devil.<sup>2</sup> Historically speaking, it led to many dissensions and quarrels in the world between Muslims and Christians. Misunderstanding can destroy the peaceful co-existence of different faiths. We have many examples for the same in the contemporary period.

We are living in a world which is more complex and multidimensional than ever. Today we need dialogue for the co-existence of different religions together. Nobody is an island today as everyone is connected to others in numerous ways. The modern world is a dependent world. We cannot survive long without depending on others although we have made extensive progress in science and technology. Therefore, it is an undeniable fact that we are living in a multi-religious, complex society. Different attitudes, orientations of various faiths can be comprehensibly understood and mutually accepted by dialogue. This paper mainly focuses on two things, first on the early migration of Muslims to Abyssinia and their initial dialogue with the Christian King, Negus. How did they succeed in putting forward the common grounds which were found in the Holy Scriptures of both Christians and Muslims? How did it help Muslims to take Christians into confidence? And how the common factors which were mentioned in *Nostra Aetate*,<sup>3</sup> the document of the Church, applied in the case of Abyssinian

---

<sup>2</sup>June Idleman Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)

migration? While we present this paper, we admit the gap between the historical events of Abyssinian migration and promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*. Here we try to apply the principles which are laid in *Nostra Aetate* in anticipation to the historical event of Abyssinian migration and its aftereffects.

### **Background of Abyssinian Migration**

We think that before we deal with Abyssinian migration, it is good to pay attention to the social and religious situations in Arabia. Arabia was a land of many tribes and clans. Quraysh was one of the important tribes of Arabia. Kaaba and surrounding areas were popular for trade and fairs. The Quraysh tribe maintained it well for economic purposes. People used to come there from around the world to worship, as there were more than 360 Gods and Goddesses, both major and minor. As a result, Kaaba and surrounding areas became places of business rather than devotion. The Quraysh tribe used to keep the money and the sanctuary.

Prophet Muhammad started getting revelation 610 onwards. Then he started preaching the new monotheistic religion among the people. Many were attracted by his new religion. They embraced the new religion. Once Prophet Muhammad started preaching monotheism, it was a direct blow on the economic interest of the Quraysh tribe. They were considered as the legal custodians of the sacred Kaaba. Kaaba was a sacred place of worship for Arabians. Since the Kaaba had become the religious centre of Arabia by that time and every year people would gather there for Hajj, idolatry spread throughout the country. There were almost 360 idols around Kaaba.<sup>4</sup> When Prophet Muhammad preached against polytheism, it affected the annual income of the Quraysh tribe. They knew that if the situation is allowed to continue, then it would adversely affect their economic profit from 360 idols. But once he started preaching the new religion, the Quraysh tribe also started persecution and torturing against Prophet Muhammad and the adherents of new faith. Once the policy of opposition to Muhammad had been adopted, the leading merchants and their friends took steps to make life difficult for their younger brothers and cousins and other members of their families and clans who were attracted to Muhammad's movement.<sup>5</sup> "The poets insulted him; tribe plotted against him, threw stones at his house, threatened his folks and

---

<sup>4</sup>[www.reviewofreligions.org](http://www.reviewofreligions.org)

<sup>5</sup>Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974, 66.

followers and came close to killing him near the Kaaba.”<sup>6</sup> Finally to save his followers from the persecution Prophet Muhammad advised his followers, “If ye went to the country of the Abyssinians, ye would find there a king under none suffer wrong. It is land of sincerity in religion. Until such time as God shall make for you a means of relief from what ye now are suffering.”<sup>7</sup> All these paved way for first migration.

These new measures resulted in the migration to Abyssinia of eleven Makkan families followed in 615 by 83 others, chief among whom was that of ‘Uthman Ibn Affan. The emigrants found asylum in the domain of Christian Negus, who was unbending in his refusal to deliver them into the hands of their oppressors.<sup>8</sup>

He sent some of his followers to the Christian country. This is the first migration. The emigrants were well received by Abyssinians and were allowed complete freedom of worship.<sup>9</sup>

### **Aftermath of the Migration**

The Quraysh did not allow them to live peacefully in Abyssinia. Meccans were apparently alarmed and immediately sent two men to the Negus of Abyssinia and from him, it is said, demanded the repatriation of the emigrants.<sup>10</sup> They followed them to Abyssinia. They tried to bribe the officials and the King of Abyssinia with valuable gifts. They knew that Abyssinians were very fond of leatherworks, they with themselves large number of fine skins to give as gifts under the leadership of Quraysh leader Amr Ibn Al-as.<sup>11</sup> The emissaries gave the valuable gifts to the generals and explained about the new religion of Muhammad. Accused them as heretics, and reported that they gave up their religion and invented new one unknown to everyone. “The nobles of their people have sent us to your king on their account, that he may send them home.”<sup>12</sup> So the generals agreed to hand over those immigrants to them. But they needed to get final permission from Negus, the King. When generals urged king to hand over them, he replied,

---

<sup>6</sup>Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, Chicago: American Trust Publications, 2005, 119.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991, 81.

<sup>8</sup>Philip K. Hitti, *History of Arabs*, Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1984, 114.

<sup>9</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 83.

<sup>10</sup>Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, 68.

<sup>11</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 83.

<sup>12</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 84.

Nay, by God, they shall not be betrayed – a people that have sought my protection and made my country their abode and chosen me above all others. Give them up I will not, until I have summoned them and questioned them concerning what these men say of them. If it be as they have said, then I will deliver them unto them, that they may restore them to their own people. But if not, then will I be their good protector so long as they seek my protection.<sup>13</sup>

Then both factions were called to the court of Negus and asked them to speak of their religion. For that Jafar from Muslim side answered,

O king, we were a people steeped in ignorance, worshipping idols, eating unsacrificed carrion, committing abomination, and the strong would devour the weak. Thus we were, until God sent us a messenger from out of our mist, one whose lineage we know, and his veracity and his worthiness of trust and integrity. He called us into God, that we should testify to his Oneness and worship Him and renounce what we and our fathers had worshipped in the way of stones and idols, and he commanded us to speak truly, to fulfil our promises, to respect the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbours, and to refrain from crimes and from the bloodshed. So we worship one God alone, setting naught beside Him, counting as forbidden what He hath forbidden and licit what He hath allowed. For these reasons have our people turned against us, and have persecuted to make us forsake our religion and revert from the worship of God to the worship of idols. That is why we have come to thy country, having chosen thee above all others, and we have been happy in thy protection, and it is our hope, O king, that here, with thee, we shall not suffer wrong.<sup>14</sup>

Then King asked them about their revelation. Jafar spoke from the Chapter on Mary on the virgin birth of Jesus. By hearing it Negus wept and said, “This hath truly come from the same source as that which Jesus brought” and said to Quraysh, “Ye may go, for by God I will not deliver them unto you, they shall not be betrayed.”<sup>15</sup> Again about Jesus Jafar said, “We say of him what our Prophet brought unto us, that he is the slave of God and his messenger and His spirit and His word which He cast into Mary the blessed virgin.”<sup>16</sup> Then King permitted them to stay in his country as long as they wish. And he asked the envoys of Quraysh to return to their country with their gifts.

---

<sup>13</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 85.

<sup>14</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 86

<sup>15</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 85.

<sup>16</sup>Lings, *Muhammad*, 85.

### Letter of Prophet Muhammad to Negus

In this connection we would like to add an important information regarding the migration to Abyssinia and its aftereffect. That is a letter written by Prophet Muhammad to Negus and Negus's reply to the same. After the famous Hudaibiyya treaty, which was signed between Prophet Muhammad on behalf of Medina and Meccan Authorities in 628 AD that reduced the tension between two cities considerably and thereby Prophet Muhammad became a political powerful entity, he started to write to different Kings in and outside of Arabia.<sup>17</sup> Though Prophet Muhammad sent his people to Abyssinia for the protection, he never met Abyssinian King Negus. All the communications were made through letters. The letter written by Prophet Muhammad to Negus is worthy to mention here.

In the name of Allah, the most beneficent, the most merciful. From Muhammad the messenger of Allah to Negus, King of Abyssinia. Peace upon him who follows true guidance.

Salutations, I entertain Allah's praise, there is no god but He, the sovereign, the holy, the source of peace, the giver of peace, the guardian of faith, the preserver of safety. I bear witness that Jesus, the son of Mary, is the spirit of Allah and His word which He cast into Mary, the virgin, the good, the pure, so that she conceived Jesus. Allah created him from His spirit and his breathing as He created Adam by His hand. I called you to Allah alone with no associate and to his obedience and to follow me and to believe in that which came to me, for I am the messenger of Allah. I invite you and your men to Allah, the glorious, the all-mighty. I hereby bear witness that I have communicated my message and advice. I invite you to listen and accept my advice. Peace be upon him who follows true guidance.<sup>18</sup>

When Negus had received the letter from Prophet Muhammad he replied as follows:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. From Negus Ashama to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.

Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah! and mercy and blessing from Allah beside Whom there is no god. I have received your letter in which you have mentioned about Jesus and by the Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus is not more than what you say. We fully acknowledge that with which you have been sent to us and we have entertained your cousin and his companions. I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah, true and confirming (those who have gone before you), I pledge to you

---

<sup>17</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Hudaybiyyah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Hudaybiyyah)

<sup>18</sup> [d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih\\_books/single2/en\\_The\\_letters\\_of\\_the\\_Prophet\\_Muhammad\\_to\\_king\\_beyond\\_Arabia](http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single2/en_The_letters_of_the_Prophet_Muhammad_to_king_beyond_Arabia)

through your cousin and surrender myself through him to the Lord of the worlds.<sup>19</sup>

It is very clear from the letter mentioned above that Prophet Muhammad kept on the relationship with Negus even after he was in a good position. He remembers him with great respect for the protection Negus extended during the infancy of the Islam. In the letter also we find Prophet Muhammad's intention to relate with the king with words and sentiments common to both Christians and Islam. He mentions the relevance and greatness of Jesus. Of course, there are many differences with regards to the divinity and other matters related to Jesus between Christians and Muslims. But still there are many possibilities of relating others with commonalities found in other religions. The same is made use by Prophet Muhammad. It is important to note that when Negus died Prophet prayed in absence for Negus. It is also debatable that some say that Negus finally became a Muslim but there is no strong historical evidence for that.<sup>20</sup>

### **Second Vatican Council on Islam**

It is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that profound changes begin to take place in the dialogical relationship between Islam and Christianity, changes that may herald further development in our time. The Second Vatican council which took place from 1962 to 1965 was a revolutionary council of the Catholic Church which brought many Copernican changes in the Catholic Church after reading the signs of the time. It was the Council which was ready to make pardon for the past mistakes of the Catholic Church towards other religions. Texts that discuss interreligious dialogue are *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated on 21 November 1964; *Nostra Aetate*, on 28 October 1965; *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad Gentes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, all on 7 December 1965.

We shall perhaps to begin with *Nostra Aetate*, 1965 Vatican declaration on the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions.<sup>21</sup> The very meaning of the word *Nostra Aetate* is 'in our time.'<sup>22</sup> *Nostra Aetate* is a significant document that challenges Roman Catholic Churches to open up and rethink their attitudes

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.iqrasense.com/prophet-muhammad/letter-of-prophet-muhammad-to-negus-najashi-calling-him-to-islam.html>

<sup>20</sup><http://mercyprophet.org/mul/node/1023>

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious Dialogue*, Chichester: Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2013, 250.

<sup>22</sup>[https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20101027\\_1.htm](https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20101027_1.htm)



towards other religions, and reflect on the fact that all human beings are 'but one community.'<sup>23</sup>

In the beginning of the document *Nostra Aetate*, it states that, "In her task of fostering unity and love among men, and even among nations, she gives primary consideration in this document to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them."<sup>24</sup> The intention of the Catholic Church to make genuine effort to realize the unity and love among different sections of the people is very clear from the first sentence itself. There are many common things that bind human beings together. We need to take care of them for the purpose of having good relationship between different religions. It is obvious that there are many differences between different religions with regards to their doctrines, attitudes, lifestyles, customs, rituals, etc. But these factors should not be a stumbling block for the unity and fellowship. We need to concentrate on the common factors. At the same time very categorically Catholic Church admits and upholds truths in other religions. The Council says,

The catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.<sup>25</sup>

What we lack is the willingness to seek rays of truth in other religions. The absolute religious claims hinder the seeking of rays of truth in other religions. The pre-requisite for that is an open mind which would help us to understand the ray of truth which enlightens the human beings.

The Muslims take a special place within the religions of the world. Therefore, the attitude of the Church towards Islam is treated in a special section.<sup>26</sup> Article number 3 of *Nostra Aetate* deserves special attention in this regard. After mentioning the world religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, Church makes its stand clear on Islam. It states as follows,

Upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all powerful, maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even

---

<sup>23</sup>Ataullah Siddiqui, *Christian – Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, London: St Martin's Press, 1997, 34.

<sup>24</sup>Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

<sup>25</sup>Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 3.

to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgement when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.<sup>27</sup>

The declaration on Religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*), another important document of the Second Vatican Council was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965. It was done in the background of the view that 'there was no salvation outside the church.'<sup>28</sup> It really strained the relationship of the church with other religions over many centuries. This document stresses the importance of freedom of conscience. It belongs to everyone. When we come to *Nostra Aetate*, we see more concrete steps towards interreligious dialogue and relationship. *Nostra Aetate* first acknowledges major features in the Islamic doctrine of God. They worship God, who is unique, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to human beings. This involves them in submitting themselves wholeheartedly to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God.<sup>29</sup>

The common factors are stressed in the document. God revealed in different times and to different people. God also spoke to Muslims so that they came to faith in God as 'unique, living, and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth.'<sup>30</sup> From the doctrine of God, the document moves its focus to Jesus. Muslims consider Jesus as a prophet, although they do not consider Him as son of God. Here we need to note that the controversial Trinitarian theology is not mentioned. It has been a bone of contention for Muslims. For Muslims, it is very difficult to understand the Trinity and monotheism. So, the Council prudently kept it away from the discussion. Muslims also give reverence to and even invoke the name of Mother Mary as a model and virgin. *Nostra Aetate* also gave

---

<sup>27</sup>Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 3.

<sup>28</sup>Gerry O. Hanlon, "Religious Freedom," *The Furrow* 64, 2 (Feb 2013) 67.

<sup>29</sup>Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 101.

<sup>30</sup>O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 101.

importance for common grounds like monotheistic faith in God revealed as the Creator of the universe (to which *Nostra Aetate* adds that Christians and Muslims alike expect the day when all human beings will be raised from the dead and divine judgement will be passed on them, and the virgin conception of Jesus and his activity as prophet. The Council also gives esteem regard for the moral life of Muslims, and the way they worship God in prayer, almsgiving and fasting.<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion and Observations

A model of interreligious dialogue takes place in the Abyssinian court of Negus between Muslims and Christians is depicted here. They tried to find commonalities in both religions than differences. There is a common ground of co-operation and harmony between the followers of different religious traditions. The aim of the dialogue is to establish a communion between two partners. Such a communion is realized by brotherly relations and peace with one another.<sup>32</sup> The example cited in the case of Negus is a true example to legitimise this statement. He made a strong relationship between Christians and Muslims in the early stage of Islamic growth. He could make a brotherly atmosphere for both Christians and Muslims in his country. When the Muslims came to Abyssinia as migrants, Negus had two options, namely, to receive them or to reject them. He chose the first over the second. But we have seen the process in which they have been received to his country. It was done after a long discussion and dialogue between Muslims and Christian king Negus. Although there was an element of misleading from the part of Quraysh tribe and its leaders, the king chose the right way to find solution for the impending problem. It was a dialogue based on the Holy Scriptures. Muslims could explain the truths of Islam based on Quran. They explained the revealed truths in Quran. The king had the patience to listen to them so that they could present themselves and their truth claims in front of the king and his courtiers. Then king realised that there were many points and truths which were similar to his faith, which is Christian faith. After realizing the truth, the king granted them permission to stay in his country as long as they desired. He also promised his protection to them.

7<sup>th</sup> century Christian king Negus and Muslims engaged in a dialogue which was an anticipated dialogical process that the 20<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 102.

<sup>32</sup>Borrmans, *Guidelines for a dialogue between Muslims and Christians*, New York: Paulist Press, 1990, 102.

century Second Vatican Council promulgated through its document *Nostra Aetate*. For every society or association, it is important to overcome the initial hurdles in its growth and upward mobility. For infant Islamic community, the threat comes from their own people and society. Therefore, it was so strong that could have destroyed the infant Islam if they had not resorted to the help of Negus. In other words, it was an existential crisis for Islamic religion.

As we analyse the entire episode of Abyssinian migration, we understand that the open mindedness of Negus was one of the praiseworthy factors to be appreciated. So this is one of the prerequisite for a fruitful dialogue. King Negus did not have any prejudice about the new religion. He was also ready to make an open discussion with the opposing members. This is what we lack today. Instead of open-mindedness, people tend to become narrow minded and easily become prey to prejudices. If prejudices dominate the scene, nothing positive can be expected from such a dialogue. Each one will be ready to conquer others with prejudices which would finally be ended up in total collapse. Therefore, we would say that the greatest lesson from the Abyssinian migration is the openness towards other religions, as shown by King Negus and the trust put forward by Prophet Muhammad in a Christian king.

We would like to make a few critical observations on the Abyssinian migration and its aftereffects. It is unfortunate to note that the fruits of the co-existence did not last long. After the death of both Prophet and King Negus, there were many quarrels and misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims all over the world. So there is a tendency to label this co-existence as a short one. It was a necessity from the part of Islam to protect its adherents in its initial period from the outside attacks. But once they are established well, their attitude of openness and understanding might have changed. And the welcoming mentality of the Christian kings also might have been affected.

The content of the letter of Prophet Muhammad to Negus can be interpreted as a call for conversion to Islam. Prophet is inviting the king Negus to Islam. The last part of the letter to the king goes like this:

I called you to Allah alone with no associate and to his obedience and to follow me and to believe in that which came to me, for I am the messenger of Allah. I invite you and your men to Allah, the glorious, the all-mighty. I hereby bear witness that I have communicated my message

and advice. I invite you to listen and accept my advice. Peace be upon him who follows true guidance.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the tone of Prophet Muhammad changed significantly. In the infancy stage of Islam, Prophet Muhammad sought the refuge of Negus, the Christian king. But later, when he became powerful in socio-political spheres of Arabia, he was able to command or invite the king to accept Prophet's religion. We think that this is one of the problems when a religion becomes established; it starts to force others to follow it forgetting the steps they had initially made in the beginning stage. If we have genuine intention to appreciate the rays of truth in other religions, then this kind of actions can harm the process of interreligious dialogue. Although we have made a couple of negative observations on the letter the Prophet had sent, the historical relevance of the migration to Abyssinia and its impacts on Islam cannot be belittled.

Regarding the concepts of interreligious dialogue and relationship with other religions stipulated in *Nostra Aetate*, a question should be posed. How far Catholics are able to implement them or understand other religions as having 'rays of truth'? We think Catholics need to make effort to understand other religions. Although certain limitations are obvious in the implementations, the fruits of this document are countless.

### **Future Prospects**

The second part of *Nostra Aetate*, No. 3 is an advice for today's generation.

Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.

It is very clear that the above mentioned paragraph of the Second Vatican Council is the reflection and admittance of the Church authorities on the dissensions and quarrels happened between Christians and Muslims over the past 1500 years. Hence, the Council has urged people to forget those unfortunate happenings and make sincere effort to make mutual understanding. We need to accept the very fact that we are living in a pluralistic society. The Council's advice is a helpful aid to build a peaceful human society amidst its

---

<sup>33</sup> [d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih\\_books/single2/en\\_The\\_letters\\_of\\_the\\_Prophet\\_Muhammad\\_to\\_king\\_beyond\\_Arabia](http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single2/en_The_letters_of_the_Prophet_Muhammad_to_king_beyond_Arabia)

plural settings. Even though a global suspicion on Islam by the 9/11 attacks on WTC, was created, it is not proper to suspect the genuine Muslims for the mischief of a very minority Islamic followers. Here, the Council is proposing to safeguard and promote social justice, moral values, peace and freedom in the world. When we analyse the core of every religion, these are the foundational values found in them. The existence of the human race is largely dependent on these values. Being the largest religions in the world, both Christianity and Islam can become models before others in the process of peacebuilding. Definitely it would produce its fruits of social justice, moral values, peace and freedom in the world.