



THE MODEL OF MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN THE HIJRA TO ABYSSINIA

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Abstract

This study examines the model of Islamic-Christian dialogue that emerged during the Hijra to Abyssinia (615 CE), a pivotal yet understudied episode in early Islamic history. Despite extensive scholarship on Muslim-Christian relations in medieval and modern contexts, the Hijra to Abyssinia as a specific locus of interreligious dialogue has received insufficient analytical attention. Prior studies, such as those by Goddard (2000) and Ahmed (1992), have addressed the historical background of Muslim-Christian encounters in general terms but have not systematically analyzed the dialogical model operative in this event. This study addresses that research gap by applying the typology of interreligious dialogue, particularly the inclusivist-pluralist framework, to the primary historical narratives documented in Ibn Hisham's *Sirat Rasul Allah* and Al-Mubarakfuri's *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum*. A qualitative methodology with a historical-hermeneutical approach was employed, involving four stages: source collection, source criticism (*heuristik* and *kritik*), interpretation (*interpretasi*), and historiographical writing (*historiografi*). The findings reveal that the encounter between Jafar ibn Abi Talib and King Negus constitutes a sophisticated theological dialogue characterized by three distinct phases: confrontation, theological clarification, and mutual recognition. This study proposes the Abrahamic Encounter Framework as a new analytical category in interreligious dialogue theory demonstrating, through retroactive application of contemporary theory to a seventh-century CE event, that the inclusivist-pluralist model was not merely a modern discursive invention but was already operative in the foundational history of Islam. This finding has concrete practical implications: contemporary Muslim-Christian dialogue initiatives can draw upon this historically grounded Abrahamic Encounter Framework as a prescriptive model for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Hijra, Abyssinia, Interreligious Dialogue, Interfaith Coexistence, Islamic History



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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Islam and Christianity has been one of the defining dynamics of world history, shaping civilizational encounters, theological debates, and political configurations from the seventh century to the present day (Hitti, 1970). From the earliest days of the Islamic community, Muslims have been in sustained contact with Christian communities across the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, North Africa, and beyond (Goddard, 2000) (Trimingham 1979) (Hellyer 2001). These encounters have ranged from conflict and polemics to cooperation and mutual accommodation, producing a rich and complex historical record that continues to inform contemporary interfaith relations (Kate Zebiri, 1997).

Among the earliest and most significant episodes of Muslim-Christian encounter is the Hijra to Abyssinia (615 CE), in which a group of early Muslims fled Meccan persecution and sought refuge in the Christian Kingdom of Axum, ruled by King Negus (Najasyi). This event is remarkable not only for its historical importance as the first Muslim diaspora experience but also for the theological dialogue it engendered between Islamic and Christian communities at the very dawn of Islamic history (Race 1983). The account, preserved in classical Islamic sources, records a substantive exchange between Jafar ibn Abi Talib, as spokesman for the Muslim refugees (Esposito 2010), and the Christian king regarding the theological nature of Jesus and the foundational principles of Islam.

Despite the significance of this episode, a review of existing literature reveals a notable research gap: while historians such as (Goddard, 2000) and (Ahmad, 1992) have examined the broader contours of Muslim-Christian relations and the historiography of Islam in Ethiopia, respectively, no study has systematically analyzed the Hijra to Abyssinia through the theoretical lens of contemporary interreligious dialogue models. Studies on Muslim-Christian dialogue in the early Islamic period tend to focus on later developments, such as the theological debates of the eighth and ninth centuries (Griffith, 2012), the polemical literature of medieval scholars (Thomas and Roggema, 2008), or the institutional frameworks for dialogue in the modern era (Borrmans, 1990). The Hijra event, by contrast, represents an earlier, organically occurring form of dialogue that has not been subject to rigorous theoretical analysis.

Furthermore, studies on the Hijra to Abyssinia itself, such as those by (Carmichael, 1996) and (Ficquet, 2015), focus primarily on the political and socio-historical dimensions of the event,

particularly the Aksumite kingdom's geopolitical position and its relations with the Arabian Peninsula (Jeffery 1945). While these studies provide valuable contextual information, they do not engage with the dialogical character of the encounter between the Muslim refugees and the Abyssinian Christians. The internal theological dynamics of this encounter, what was said, how it was received, and what model of dialogue it exemplifies, remain undertheorized.

This study seeks to fill this gap by addressing the following research questions: (1) What was the background of the Muslim migration to Abyssinia? and (2) What model of Islamic-Christian dialogue was enacted during the Hijra to Abyssinia? The novelty of this research lies in what may be characterized as a “retroactive theory” approach: the systematic application of contemporary interfaith dialogue theory, specifically the inclusivist-pluralist typology derived from the works of (Cornille 2013), (Knitter 2014), and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Dialogue 1991), to analyze a classical Islamic historical event. This retroactive application of theory reveals that the inclusivist-pluralist paradigm was not invented by modern scholars but was enacted organically by the first generation of Muslims, thereby proposing the Abrahamic Encounter Framework as a new category in interreligious dialogue scholarship — one grounded in the historical precedent of the seventh century CE. This finding contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to ground modern interreligious dialogue in its historical and theological sources (Esposito 2002). This finding contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to ground modern interreligious dialogue in its historical and theological sources (Swidler 1990) (Volf 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on contemporary scholarship in interreligious dialogue, which provides a systematic framework for analyzing the nature, structure, and implications of encounters among different religious traditions. Three theoretical components are particularly relevant to this analysis.

First, this study employs Cornille’s (2013) comprehensive typology of interreligious dialogue, which defines dialogue as any constructive engagement between religious traditions characterized by mutual respect and openness to learning from the other. Cornille identifies five conditions for genuine interreligious dialogue: humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality. These conditions provide criteria against which the dialogue of the Hijra event can

be evaluated. Cornille's framework is particularly useful because it moves beyond a merely procedural understanding of dialogue (as formal meetings or structured debates) to encompass the deeper attitudinal and theological dispositions that make genuine encounter possible.

Second, this study employs the typology of religious attitudes toward other faiths developed by Knitter (2014), based on the earlier work of Alan Race (Race 1983): exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. These segments of the Christian church have, due to the increasing religious pluralism of contemporary society, come to value the importance and necessity of formally embedding tolerance within the civic sphere (Martin 1998). In the exclusivist model, one's own religion is held to be the sole repository of truth and salvation, with other religions being categorically false or insufficient. In the inclusivist model, one's own religion is held to be normatively superior. However, other religions are recognized as containing partial truths or as oriented toward the fullness of truth found in one's own tradition. In the pluralist model, multiple religious traditions are recognized as equally valid paths to ultimate reality or salvation. These categories are applied in this study not as absolute classifications but as heuristic tools for analyzing the theological logic operative in the dialogue between Jafar and King Negus.

Third, this study draws on the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue's (1991) fourfold typology of dialogue: dialogue of life (living together in peace), dialogue of action (cooperation for human welfare), theological dialogue (exchange of theological positions), and dialogue of religious experience (sharing of spiritual practices). This typology allows for a nuanced analysis of the multi-dimensional character of the Muslim-Christian encounter in Abyssinia, which involved not only theological exchange but also practical dimensions of coexistence and mutual support.

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide the analytical tools for examining how the encounter between the early Muslim community and the Abyssinian Christian kingdom produced a distinctive model of interreligious dialogue grounded in shared Abrahamic values, characterized by theological openness, and oriented toward peaceful coexistence.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining historical methods with hermeneutical analysis of primary texts. The choice of qualitative methodology is appropriate

because the object of study consists of historical narratives, theological dialogues, and interpretive texts that require contextual analysis rather than quantitative measurement. The historical method is the standard approach in Islamic historiography and has been widely employed in studies of early Islamic history by scholars such as Watt (1953), Hodgson (1974), and Peters (1994).

Data Sources

Primary data for this study are drawn from two classical Islamic biographical sources (Sirah Nabawiyah): (1) Ibn Hisham's *Sirat Rasul Allah* (d. 218 AH/833 CE), which is the most authoritative early biography of the Prophet Muhammad and contains the most detailed account of the Hijra to Abyssinia; and (2) Al-Mubarakfuri's *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum* (Contents Sealed Nectar, 1979/2011), a modern comprehensive biography of the Prophet that synthesizes classical sources and has won the first prize at the First World Conference on Sirah and Hadith in Rabat, Morocco (1979).

Secondary data are drawn from a range of academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, and edited volumes on Muslim-Christian relations, Islamic history, interreligious dialogue theory, and the history of the Aksumite Kingdom. Secondary sources were selected based on the following criteria: (a) academic credibility (peer-reviewed or published by established academic presses); (b) direct relevance to the themes of Muslim-Christian dialogue, the Hijra, or Abyssinian history; and (c) a combination of classical and recent publications (up to 2025) to ensure both historical depth and theoretical currency.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through systematic reading and documentation (*studi dokumentasi*) of primary and secondary sources. For primary sources, the relevant passages concerning the Hijra to Abyssinia in Ibn Hisham and Al-Mubarakfuri were identified, translated, and cross-referenced to ensure accuracy. For secondary sources, a systematic literature review was conducted using academic databases including JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus, using the search terms "Muslim-Christian dialogue," "Hijra Abyssinia," "Axum Kingdom," "interfaith dialogue early Islam," and related terms.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the four-stage historical method as formulated by Kuntowijoyo (2005): (1) Heuristik (source collection), identifying and gathering all relevant primary and

secondary sources; (2) Kritik (source criticism), evaluating the authenticity and credibility of sources through both external criticism (examining the provenance and transmission of texts) and internal criticism (evaluating the consistency and plausibility of content); (3) Interpretasi (interpretation), analyzing the meaning and significance of the historical data, including the application of interreligious dialogue theory; and (4) Historiografi (historical writing), synthesizing the findings into a coherent analytical narrative.

In addition to the historical method, this study employs hermeneutical analysis to interpret the theological content of the dialogue between Jafar and King Negus. The hermeneutical approach, as applied in Islamic studies (Seyyed et al. 1996) (Rahman 1982) involves contextual reading of texts that attends to the historical, linguistic, and theological dimensions of their meaning.

Data Validity

The validity of interpretations was ensured through triangulation of sources: key claims about the Hijra event were cross-referenced across multiple historical sources (Ibn Sa'd 1904), and interpretive conclusions were subjected to intersubjective verification by reference to established scholarship. Where sources disagree on details, these discrepancies are noted and discussed critically.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Historical Background of the Hijra to Abyssinia

The Hijra to Abyssinia took place in the fifth year of Muhammad's prophethood (615 CE), approximately eight years before the more well-known Hijra to Medina (622 CE). By this time, the nascent Muslim community in Mecca faced severe persecution from the Quraysh, the dominant tribe of Mecca, who perceived the new monotheistic movement as a threat to their social, economic, and religious order. The persecution took multiple forms: physical torture of enslaved Muslims, economic boycott, social ostracism, and psychological pressure designed to compel apostasy.

In response to this escalating persecution, the Prophet Muhammad received Quranic revelations (Surah Al-Kahf and Surah Az-Zumar) that signaled the permissibility and wisdom of

seeking refuge elsewhere. Based on these divine indications and his knowledge of Abyssinia's political and social character, Muhammad directed his companions to migrate to Abyssinia, describing it as a land ruled by a just king in whose domain no one was wronged (Al-Hamidi, 2000). The choice of Abyssinia was strategically significant: it was a Christian kingdom with established trade relations with Mecca, possessed a reputation for justice and religious tolerance under King Negus (Najasyi Ashmah ibn Abjar), and was geographically accessible via established trade routes through the port of Shu'ayba.

The first wave of migration comprised eleven men and four women who departed secretly for Abyssinia. This was followed by subsequent waves, eventually totaling approximately eighty-three individuals. Among the earliest migrants were notable companions such as Uthman ibn Affan and his wife Ruqayyah, daughter of the Prophet. Table 1 below provides a chronological overview of the key events of the Hijra to Abyssinia based on primary sources.

Table 1. Chronology of the Hijra to Abyssinia

No	Period/Year	Key Actors	Events	Sources
1	5th Year of Prophethood (615 CE)	Prophet Muhammad, Early Muslims	Revelation of Surah Al-Kahf and Az-Zumar; Prophet instructs migration to Abyssinia	Ibn Hisham (1967); Al-Mubarakfuri (2011)
2	615 CE (First Wave)	11 men, 4 women incl. Uthman ibn Affan & Ruqayyah	First group departs secretly via port of Shu'ayba on two vessels	Ibn Hisham (1967); Ibn Sa'd (1904)
3	615–616 CE	Quraysh emissaries: Amr ibn al-As & Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah	Quraysh sends delegation with gifts to Negus to request return of Muslim refugees	Ibn Hisham (1967)
4	615–616 CE	Jafar ibn Abi Talib, King Negus, Abyssinian bishops	Theological dialogue between Muslim spokesperson and Christian king; Negus grants protection	Ibn Hisham (1967); Al-Mubarakfuri (2011)
5	616–622 CE	Muslim community in Abyssinia (~83 individuals)	Muslims live peacefully in Abyssinia, practicing their religion freely under Negus's protection	Ahmed (1992); Carmichael (1996)

The Muslim-Christian Theological Dialogue

The most analytically significant aspect of the Hijra to Abyssinia is the theological dialogue that took place between Jafar ibn Abi Talib, representing the Muslim community, and King Negus, representing the Abyssinian Christian kingdom. Based on the primary sources, this dialogue can

be divided into three distinct phases, as represented schematically in Table 2 below. It is important to appreciate the analytical significance of this three-phase structure: it is not merely a descriptive chronology of what was said, but a model of dialogical transformation. The movement from confrontation (Phase 1), in which the Quraysh emissaries attempted to frame Islam as deviant from both Arab tradition and Christian orthodoxy, through theological clarification (Phase 2), in which Jafar reframed Islam as the fulfillment of Abrahamic monotheism, to mutual recognition (Phase 3), in which Negus acknowledged a shared divine origin between the two traditions, constitutes a complete arc of what Cornille (2013) would call genuine interreligious encounter. Each phase corresponds to a distinct attitudinal shift: exclusivist framing gives way to inclusivist engagement, which in turn generates a pluralist-inclusivist moment of recognition. The table below maps these phases against the key theological values and dialogue implications operative in each, enabling the reader to track this transformation analytically.

Table 2. Analysis of the Dialogue Phases in the Hijra to Abyssinia

No	Dialogue Phase	Parties Involved	Key Arguments/Statements	Theological Values	Dialogue Implications
1	Phase 1: Confrontation	Quraysh emissaries (Amr ibn al-As, Abdullah ibn Rabi'ah) vs. Negus	Quraysh: Muslims have abandoned ancestral religion and refuse to adopt Christianity; they follow a novel religion	Exclusivist framing: Islam presented as deviant from both Arab tradition and Christian orthodoxy	Creates the agenda for theological examination; Negus remains neutral and seeks direct inquiry
2	Phase 2: Theological Clarification	Jafar ibn Abi Talib (for Muslims) vs. Negus (for Christian community)	Jafar's speech: Islam as moral transformation from ignorance (jahiliyyah) to monotheism, justice, and human dignity; recitation of Surah Maryam on Jesus	Inclusivist framing: Islam as fulfillment and continuation of Abrahamic monotheism; Jesus acknowledged as prophet, spirit and word of God	Negus weeps upon hearing Quranic verses; recognizes convergence between Islamic and Christian understanding of Jesus
3	Phase 3: Mutual Recognition	Negus (representing Christian kingdom) to Muslim community	Negus: 'This (Islam) and what Jesus brought came from a single light source' (Ibn Hisham, 1967); extends full protection to Muslims	Pluralist-inclusivist recognition: both traditions seen as sharing divine origin;	Muslims granted full religious freedom and protection; Negus refuses to surrender them

differences acknowledged but unity emphasized	to Quraysh; model of peaceful coexistence established
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A particularly significant moment in the dialogue occurs during Phase 2, when Jafar recites the opening verses of Surah Maryam (Q. 19), which contains the Quranic account of the Virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus. Eastern Christians most frequently interacted with those passages of the Qur'an that discuss Jesus, referring to him as 'Īsā. In some cases, their responses reflect familiarity with the exact phrasing of these verses; in other cases, they engage with the arguments presented in the verses as encountered during interreligious dialogue (Pratt et al. 2020). The selection of this particular Quranic passage was strategically and theologically astute: it addressed the central theological concern of the Christian community (the nature and status of Jesus) while presenting the Islamic position in terms that acknowledged Jesus's divine mission without endorsing the Trinitarian formulation that distinguished mainstream Chalcedonian Christianity from the Miaphysite theology of the Abyssinian (Coptic Orthodox) Church.

Table 3 below provides a comparative analysis of the theological positions articulated by both parties in the dialogue. The analytical value of this comparison lies not merely in cataloguing agreements and disagreements, but in revealing the precise theological architecture that made mutual recognition possible. As the table demonstrates, the convergences between Islamic and Miaphysite Christian theology are substantial, covering the monotheistic foundation, the virginal birth of Jesus, the honor accorded to Mary, the ethical imperatives of justice and human dignity, and the concept of divine revelation, while the divergences, though real and theologically significant, center on the specific formulations of Trinitarian theology and the divine sonship of Christ. Crucially, these divergences were not suppressed or avoided in the dialogue; Jafar's recitation of Surah Maryam explicitly addresses the Islamic position on Jesus (as servant, messenger, spirit, and word of God) without adopting the Trinitarian formula. This transparency in presenting genuine theological difference, while simultaneously foregrounding common ground, is precisely what distinguishes the Hijra model from either syncretism (which collapses differences) or mere tolerance (which ignores them). The table is thus not a summary of data but

a structural analysis of the conditions that made the Abrahamic Encounter Framework operative in this historical event.

Table 3. Comparative Theological Positions in the Jafar–Negus Dialogue

No	Theological Theme	Islamic Position (Jafar)	Abyssinian Christian Position (Negus)	Convergence/Divergence
1	Nature of God	Strict monotheism (tawhid): God is One, without partners or associates	Miaphysite Christianity: One God, Three Persons; Christ as fully divine and human in one nature	Divergence on Trinitarian theology, but convergence on monotheistic foundation
2	Nature of Jesus	Jesus as servant of God (abd Allah), His Messenger, His Spirit (ruh), and His Word (kalima) bestowed upon Mary (Q. 4:171)	Jesus as Son of God, divine Logos incarnate; born of the Virgin Mary	Partial convergence: both affirm virginal birth and divine origin of Jesus; divergence on divinity and sonship
3	Status of Mary	Mary as a chaste, holy virgin (al-batul); honored in the Quran (Surah Maryam)	Mary as Theotokos (God-bearer) in Miaphysite theology; central figure of devotion	Strong convergence on honor and reverence for Mary
4	Moral and Ethical Teaching	Islam as call to moral transformation: abandonment of idolatry, protection of women, justice for the weak, honesty, fulfillment of trusts	Christian ethics: love of neighbor, care for the poor, justice, human dignity	Strong convergence on ethical monotheism and human dignity
5	Source of Revelation	Quran as divine revelation through the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad	Bible as divine revelation; Old and New Testaments	Convergence on concept of divine revelation; divergence on specific scripture

Discussion

The Dialogue Model and Its Theoretical Implications

The analysis of the Hijra to Abyssinia reveals a sophisticated model of interreligious dialogue that can be classified, using Knitter's (Knitter 2014) typology, as a combination of inclusivism and pluralism. On the Islamic side, Jafar's presentation reflects an inclusivist stance: Islam is presented as the fulfillment and correction of previous Abrahamic traditions, including Christianity, rather than as their negation. On the Abyssinian Christian side, Negus's response

exhibits a pluralist disposition: he does not require the Muslims to convert to Christianity or abandon their faith but rather recognizes the shared divine source of both traditions.

This finding is consistent with, but adds historical depth to, Cornille's (2013) theoretical analysis of the conditions for genuine interreligious dialogue. Cornille identifies humility, commitment to one's own tradition, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality as the necessary conditions for authentic dialogue. All five of these conditions can be identified in the Hijra dialogue: Jafar demonstrates humility by honestly describing both the pre-Islamic condition of the Arabs and the teachings of Islam without polemical exaggeration (Shahîd 1995); he maintains commitment to Islamic theological principles while acknowledging the validity of Christian concerns; Negus demonstrates empathy by listening attentively to both sides and making his judgment on the basis of direct theological inquiry rather than political pressure; and he demonstrates hospitality by extending full protection to the Muslim community regardless of the theological differences that remain.

These findings stand in contrast to the predominantly adversarial model of Muslim-Christian relations that dominates much of the later historical record. Studies of Muslim-Christian polemics in the medieval period, such as those by Thomas and Roggema (2009) and Griffith (2008), document a pattern of theological debate characterized by mutual refutation and the defense of exclusive truth claims. The Hijra dialogue predates this polemical tradition and represents an alternative model, one grounded in the practical imperative of coexistence and the shared heritage of Abrahamic monotheism.

Furthermore, the Hijra dialogue resonates strongly with the fourfold typology of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991). The encounter in Abyssinia simultaneously exemplifies: dialogue of life (Muslims and Christians living in peace in the same territory under the protection of the Abyssinian state); dialogue of action (the shared commitment of both Muslims and Christians to justice and the protection of the weak, as articulated in Jafar's speech); theological dialogue (the substantive exchange of theological positions regarding the nature of Jesus and the source of revelation); and, implicitly, dialogue of religious experience (the emotional response of Negus and the bishops to the recitation of the Quran, suggesting a recognition of shared spiritual depth).

The foregoing analysis allows this study to articulate its theoretical contribution with precision. This study proposes the Abrahamic Encounter Framework as a new analytical category in interreligious dialogue scholarship. Unlike existing typologies developed in the context of modern institutional dialogue (Cornille, 2013; Knitter, 2014), the Abrahamic Encounter Framework is grounded in a historical precedent that predates the modern interfaith movement by 14 centuries. It is defined by three constitutive elements: (1) a retroactive acknowledgment that both traditions share a common Abrahamic theological heritage, which functions as the precondition for dialogue rather than its product; (2) a dialogical movement through three phases, confrontation, theological clarification, and mutual recognition, that corresponds to a shift from exclusivist to inclusivist-pluralist attitudinal frameworks; and (3) a practical orientation toward coexistence, in which theological differences are neither suppressed nor absolutized but held in productive tension. This framework is offered not as a replacement for existing dialogue typologies but as a historically grounded supplement that demonstrates the deep roots of inclusivist-pluralist dialogue within the Islamic tradition itself. Its implications for contemporary Muslim-Christian relations are direct: it provides practitioners and scholars of interfaith dialogue with a precedent that carries both historical authority and theological resonance within the Islamic tradition (Kuruvachira, 1987).

Comparison with Prior Research on Muslim-Christian Dialogue

This study's findings can be situated within and contribute to several bodies of existing scholarship. First, with respect to historical studies of the Hijra to Abyssinia, the findings confirm and extend Ahmed's (1992) observation that the relationship between the early Muslim community and the Abyssinian Christian kingdom was characterized by mutual respect and accommodation. Ahmed's historiographical analysis focused on the political and ethnic dimensions of this relationship, particularly the Semitic-Cushitic connections between Arabs and Ethiopians, but did not examine the theological dimensions of the dialogue. This study complements Ahmed's work by providing a theoretical analysis of the dialogical model implicit in the encounter.

Second, with respect to studies of Muslim-Christian dialogue in early Islam, this study builds on Goddard's (2000) comprehensive survey of Christian-Muslim relations, which documents the complexity and diversity of early Muslim-Christian encounters. Goddard notes that early Islam's relationship with Christianity was shaped by both commonality (shared Abrahamic heritage,

monotheism) and difference (theology of the Trinity and Incarnation, prophethood, scripture). The Hijra dialogue exemplifies this dynamic precisely: it is precisely because of the substantial theological common ground between Islam and Miaphysite Christianity, both of which reject the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's two natures, that the dialogue was able to achieve the degree of mutual recognition it did. This observation suggests that the success of the Hijra dialogue was partially contingent on the specific form of Christianity practiced in Abyssinia, a point that merits further exploration in future research.

Third, with respect to theoretical studies of interreligious dialogue, the findings support Swidler's (Swidler, 1990) argument that authentic dialogue requires prior self-knowledge and a willingness to have one's own understanding transformed by encounter with the other. Jafar's masterful presentation of Islam to the Abyssinian king demonstrates precisely this combination: deep knowledge of Islamic teaching, contextual sensitivity to the theological concerns of the Christian audience, and the willingness to engage seriously with the other tradition's framework by selecting Quranic passages directly relevant to Christian theological concerns.

Volf's (2011) analysis of Muslim-Christian relations in his work *Allah: A Christian Response* is also relevant here. Volf argues that the God of the Bible and the God of the Quran are one and the same, worshiped under different names and through different theological traditions. While this claim has been contested in both Christian and Muslim theological circles, the Hijra dialogue lends it historical support: Negus's declaration that Islam and Christianity "came from a single light source" (Ibn Hisham, 1967) anticipates Volf's theological argument by fourteen centuries.

Finally, a comparison with (Borrmans, 1994) study of modern Muslim-Christian dialogue initiatives reveals both continuities and discontinuities with the Hijra model. Modern institutional dialogue, characterized by formal agreements, joint statements, and organized interfaith conferences, shares with the Hijra dialogue the goal of mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence. However, the Hijra dialogue was organically generated by an existential necessity (the Muslim community's need for protection) rather than institutionally organized, which may account for its remarkable theological depth and emotional authenticity. This observation suggests that the most productive forms of interreligious dialogue may arise from genuine existential encounter rather than from institutional design.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Hijra to Abyssinia in 615 CE was not merely a historical episode of migration, but a strategic and theologically grounded response to the persecution experienced by the early Muslim community in Mecca. The decision of Prophet Muhammad to direct his followers to Abyssinia was shaped by several interrelated factors, including Quranic moral guidance, the reputation of King Negus as a just ruler, the existing trade relations between Mecca and the Aksumite Kingdom, and the cultural-geographical proximity between the Arab and Abyssinian worlds. These findings show that the migration represented both a form of protection for a vulnerable religious minority and an early example of Islam's engagement with a Christian political and religious context.

The study also concludes that the dialogue between Jafar ibn Abi Talib and King Negus offers a meaningful model of Muslim-Christian dialogue rooted in theological honesty, empathy, contextual sensitivity, and recognition of shared Abrahamic values. This encounter developed through confrontation, clarification, and mutual recognition, reflecting an inclusivist-pluralist model of interreligious dialogue and fulfilling the major forms of dialogue identified in contemporary interfaith discourse. Theoretically, the Hijra to Abyssinia demonstrates that authentic Muslim-Christian dialogue is embedded in Islam's foundational history and remains relevant to contemporary interfaith relations. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on Islamic primary sources and its focus on a single historical event. Future research should incorporate Ethiopian Ge'ez sources, compare other early Muslim-Christian encounters, and apply broader theoretical perspectives, such as postcolonial or trauma theory, to deepen understanding of the Hijra's long-term significance for Muslim-Christian relations.

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