

The Present Day Applications of Initial Muslim-Christian Interactions

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Abstract:

Throughout history, Interfaith Dialogue has been a continuous activity in Muslims and Christians alike. According to the historian, incident of Wafad-e-Najran¹ (Najran's Delegation) was the first ever regular interaction between Muslims and Christians. Therefore, this incident has an academic and historic importance in Muslim -Christian perspectives. The Holy Quran describes this incident in detail. First 80 verses of Surah Ale-Imran were revealed in this context. Further information is found in the books of Hadith, Seerah and Islamic History. This incident can become a base for modern Muslim-Christian Dialogue and we can derive from it some basic principles of Dialogue. This article elaborates the incident of Wafad-e-Najran, its importance and also derives some important rules from it. These principles are: interfaith tolerance, harmony, communication, understandings, peaceful co-existence, honour and respect, wisdom and beautiful reasoning, common basis for interfaith dialogue, Daw'ah and perfection of Hujjah. This article also describes its applications in the Present Dialogue.

Introduction:

Islam is a religion of proof (*Daleel*) and preaching (*Da'wah*). With this as basis, it opens the door of dialogue. Islam allows existence of any other religion officially and creates among them environment of respect and tolerance. It is one of the important characteristics of Islam which is hard to witness in other faiths:

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ."

*"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error."*²

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To reveal and convey its point of view, Islam adopts the way of dialogue and debate for all the religions, and especially for the People of the Book (*Ahl al-kitab*).

As we read in the Holy Quran:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا"

"Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah. That we associate no partners with Him.

Muslim theologians say this verse of Quran is the foundation of Muslim Christian dialogue. Islam adopts the dialogue as a mission for preaching, so we find many verses and sayings of the Holy Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) in this regard.

According to the Quran:

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ"

"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance."³

According to the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*):

"بلغوا عني ولو آية"

"Convey the message even if it is only one verse."⁴

Every group has its own objectives in interfaith dialogue and Muslim participation in dialogue is due to *Da'wah* and *Shari'ah*.

As a Muslim Scholar, Dr. *Attaullah Siddiqui* says:

"Muslim participation in dialogue needs to be seen first in the theological perspective and secondly as an encounter with Christianity in the contemporary situation."⁵

Consequently, there is no doubt that according to Islam dialogue is the best way to understand and convey the message to others. According to the historian and Muslim scholars the incident of *Wafad-e-Najran* (Delegation of Najran) is the first regular interaction between Muslims and Christians in the history. So, it has very significant impact and role to further ties in Muslim - Christian relations in history and even in the present age.

Incident of Wafad-e- Najran in Islamic Sources:

Most of the Muslim scholars say that incident of *Wafad-e-Najran* is the first regular interlink and dialogue between Muslim and Christians. According

to the Islamic sources, the Christians of Najran came to inquire some questions from the Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam) in 9th Hijrah after conquest of Makkah.

According to some Muslim scholars the first 80 verses of Surah Ale-Imran in the Quran was revealed about this incident. Every *Mufasssir* has described this famous incident in detail. First of all, the Holy Quran describes this incident. Here are described the relevant verses and their "translation"⁶.

As Allah says in the Quran:

"إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ ۖ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ۚ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ۚ فَمِنْ حَاجِّكَ فِيهِ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ ۚ إِنَّ هَٰذَا هُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ ۚ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُفْسِدِينَ ۚ قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ۚ"

*"The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, and then said to him: "Be". And he was. The Truth (comes) from Allah alone; so be not of those who doubt. If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: "Come! Let us gather together, - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie! This is the true account: There is no God except Allah. And Allah, He is indeed the Exalted in Power, the Wise."*⁷

Allah Almighty Further Says in the Glorious Quran:

*Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah. That we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."*⁸

In these verses, the Holy Quran describes the incident of Najran and their conversation and challenge of *Mubahala* to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam). In the end Quran calls them to a common thing which is *Tauhid* (Monotheism), a dogmatic claim also professed by Christians. According to *Ibne-Kathir*, a Muslim *Mufasssir*, the first 80 verses of surah Ale-Imran was revealed in the perspective of *Wafad-e-Najran*. He says: "Muhammad bin Ishaq and other scholars said that the first 80 verses of Surah Ale-Imran were revealed about the delegation of Najran."⁹ He writes under the topic of *Mubahala*: "The

reason for the call to *Mubahala* was a delegation from the Christians of *Najran* who came to *Madinah* to argue about Isa (A.S) that he is Divine and son of Allah."¹⁰

He further says: "The delegation of Christian from *Najran* came to the Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam). The delegation consisted of sixty horsemen, including fourteen of their chiefs who made decisions. These men were *Al-Aqib*, *As-Sayyid*, *Abu Haritha* etc. *Al-Aqib* was their leader and to whom they referred for advice and decision; *As-Sayyid* their scholar and leader in journey and social gatherings; And *Abu Haritha* their patriarch, priest and religious leader. *Abu Haritha* knew the description of the messenger of Allah (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam) from what he had read in earlier divine scriptures."

He further says: "The *Najran* Delegation came to the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam) in *Madinah*, entered his *Masjid* wearing robes and garments, after the Prophet had prayed the Asar prayer. They accompanied a caravan of camels led by *Bani Al-Haritha bin Kab*. The companions of the Prophet who saw them said that they had never seen a delegation like them after that. Then *Abu Harithah* and *Al-Aqib* spoke to the Holy Prophet and they were Christian like the king. However, they disagreed about Isa (A.S); some of them said he is God while some said he is the son of God, and some others said he is one of the Trinity."

He says: "When these Verses are revealed to the Prophet, thus judging between him and people of the Book, Allah also command him to call them to *Mubahala*. They said O! Abu Al-Qasim let us think about this matter and get back to you with our decision to what we want to do (after consultation). They came to the Prophet and said: O Abu Al-Qasim we decided that we can not afford to do *Mubahalah* with you and that you remain on your religion, while we remain on our religion. However, send with us a man from your companions whom you are pleased to judge between us regarding our monetary disputes for you are acceptable to us in this regard." ¹¹(And the Holy Prophet sent with him *Obaidah bin Jrah* (R.A).

A prominent Muslim scholar Dr. *Wahba Az-Zuhali* says about this incident:

"It has been proved that the Holy Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam) called the Christian of *Najran* for *Mubahala* but they refused it...the Holy Quran sets the reason on their claim that Jesus is the God and calls them to actual religion and preaching which was the basic *Da'wah* of all the Prophets and that is *Tauhid*."¹²

According to *Syed Maududi*: The summary of the main points which was presented in the front of *Najran* delegation is following: "The first thing is that the faith of Jesus' Divinity is futile. The second thing is that the mission of

Jesus and Muhammad is same. The third thing is that religion of Quran and Christianity and the companion of Jesus is same."¹³

A famous Scholar *Moulana Ameen Ahsan Islahi* says about the following verse of Sura Ale-Imran :

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ"

The meaning of *Swa* (كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ) is "centre" which is common, well-known and central thing between two people or parties. According to Quran, *Tauhid* is common thing between Muslims and people of the Book, and thus, Quran starts its *Da'wah* from this common this. Such a way of conversation is according to this Verse of the Quran: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. And the special aspect of this way is that when you find a common thing with the audience, then call him on this point."¹⁴

Mufti Muhammad *Shafi Usmani* says about the verse:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ"

"We find in this verse an important principle of preaching, and it is that when you want to preach a group which is different from your own faith then you call him on the common point as the Holy Prophet wrote a letter to *Hariqal* the King of Room."¹⁵

Maulana Maududi says about these verses of the Quran:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا"

"The invitation here is for the two parties to agree on something believed in by one of them, the Muslims, and the soundness of which could hardly be denied by the other party, the Christians. For this was the belief of their own Prophets and had been taught in their own scriptures."¹⁶

Allama Ghulam Rasool Saeedi said about it:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ"

"This Verse is the basic rule of preaching to the people of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) because the prophet (SAW) used this verse in his letter to the *Hariqal* the Roman Emperor."¹⁷

Some other important Muslim *Mufasssireen* ¹⁸ also describe this incident in detail in their books.

Majority of the *Muhaddithin* and Prophet's Seerah writers (*Ahl al-Seer*) have described this important incident in their books. Here, I shall describe some of them.

According to Imam *Bukhari*:

Imam *Bukhari* has described this Incident in *Kitāb al-maghāzī* under the Chapter: The Story of the people of *Najran* (Christians).

“Narrated by Hudhafa (R.A.) *Al-Aqib* and *Sayyid* the ruler of the *Najran*, came to Allah's Messenger of doing *li'an*. One of them said to the other "Do not do this *Lia'n* (Curse). By Allah, if he is a Prophet and we do this *li'an*, neither we nor our offsprings after us will be successful." Then both of them said to the Prophet that they will give what he asked for, but he would have to send a trustworthy man with them. The Prophet said: "I will send an honest man who is really trustworthy".¹⁹

Hafiz *Ibn-Hajr Al-askalani* has described some benefits of this *Hadith* in his famous *Sharh Fath al-Bari*:

"We find permission of Debate (*Mojadlah*) with the people of the Book. We also find the permission of (Mubahala), when they totally reject the Message. We find Softness in *Shri'ah* for the People of the Book. Permission of *Jiziah*(Tax) for the People of the Book."²⁰

Imam Muslim *Al-Qushairi* in *Sahi Muslim*, Imam Abu Isa Muhammad bin Isa *al-Tirmazi* in *Sunan Al-Tirmazi*, and Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* have further described this story in their books of *Hadith*.

A great *Seerah* Writer Imam *Abd-ul- Malik Ibn- Hissham* has described the Story of *Wafad-e-Najran* in detail in his famous book *Seerah Ibn-Hisham*. As we read in the English translation "The life of Muhammad (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) by famous Orientalist²¹ Alfred Guillaume"²², summary of the *Wafad-e-Najran* incident is : A deputation from Christians of *Najran* came to the Prophet (SAW). There were sixty riders, fourteen of them from their nobles of whom three were in control of affairs, namely the *Aqib-Abdulmasih*, The sayyid *Al-Ayham*, the Bishop-*Abu-Haritha*. When they came to Medina they came into the apostle's Mosque. He prayed the afternoon prayer clad in Yamani garments, cloaks and mantle. The Prophet's companions who saw them on that day said that they never saw their likes in any deputation that came afterword. At the time of their prayer having come they stood and prayed in the apostle's Mosque, and he said that they were to be left to do so. They prayed towards East (The three leaders of them debated with Prophet). They Christians to the Byzantine rite, through they differ among themselves in some points, Saying he (Jesus) God; and he is the son of God; and he is the one of the trinity, which is a fundamental doctrine of the Christianity. They argued that he is God because he used to raise the dead, and heal the sick. They argued that he is the son of God in that they say he had no known father. They argued that he is the third of three in that God says: we have done, we have commanded...and they say if He is one He would have said I have done...but He is He and Jesus and Mary. Concerning all these questions the Quran came down. When the two divines spoke to him the apostle

said to them; submit you. They said we have submitted, He said you have not submitted so submit. They said 'nay' but we submitted before you. God sent down concerning their words and their incoherence the beginning of the *Surah Ale-Imran* up to more than 80 verses.

He further says: "When there came to the apostle news of Jesus from God and a decisive judgment between him and they and he was commanded to resort to mutual invocation of a curse if they opposed him summoned them to begin. But they said O Abu *al-Qasim* let us consider our affairs; then we come to you later with our decision...

so they came to apostle and told him that they had decided not to resort to cursing and to leave him in his religion and return home. But they would like him to send a man he could trust to decide between them in certain financial matters in case of dispute among them. He sent Abu *Ubaidah Ibne- Jarah* and calling him he said: "Go with them and judge between them faithfully in matters they dispute about."²³

According to Imam *Bahaqi*:

He describes that: "The Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) wrote a letter to the Christians of *Najran*. When this letter reached to the great Bishop, He became afraid of that and called the great councilor of the kingdom and asked him about the Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) He said you have read about a Prophet from *Bani Ismail*, May he is the Who. Then the Bishop sends a delegation of the elders of the *Najran* for research and information."²⁴

Dr. Muhammad *Hamidullah* states about this incident as:

"When the Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) ordered a Muslim tribe of the *Najran* (*Banu Haritha*) that they finish their relationships to non-Muslims even relatives, but we do not find this order for Christians of *Najran* because the Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) had contracted with the Christians of the *Najran*. It was the exceptional case for the people of the Book. Dr. Muhammad *Hamidullah* has also described some important agreements between Muslims and Christians in the age of Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) which show the valuation of relations between Muslims and Christians."²⁵

According to Imam *Ibne-Hazam Al-Zahiri*:

"He describes that when the delegation was coming to the *Madinah* from *Najran*, during the journey the horse of a man slipped. He cursed to the Holy Prophet but his brother Abu *Haritha* said curse be to you, he is a true Prophet of God. He said then why you do not believe on him. He said due to respect of our nation. So this person believed latter on the Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*)."²⁶

After that he describes some important benefits of that story:

"Affirmation of Prophet -hood is not enough for Islam, permission of debate with the People of the Book (*Ahl al-kitab*). The respect of man-kind should not be greater than Allah Cannot be punished one due to other. Agreement is conditional with non-Muslims. There is no permission of interest to Christian in Islamic State."²⁷

Some other important *Seerah* Writers and Muslim Historians²⁸ also give due weightage to this incident in their books.

Delegation of Najran in Christian sources:

Unfortunately the Christians scholars have not described this famous incident due to some unknown reasons. After a careful search and upon numerous discussion with the scholars of Muslims and Christians, could not find trace detailed information regarding this incident in Christian perspective. After the intensive search and investigation I could find only two sources which are following:

According to a famous Christian scholar and Historian Hugh Goddard:

He has described some information about the Incident of *Wafad-e-Najran* in his new and famous book *A history of Christian-Muslim relations*:

"He says that the delegation of Najran's Christians is a very important incident in the Muslim and Christian history, The Christians of *Najran* came to the Prophet Muhammad (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) and met him in good environment. They asked some questions to the Prophet and the Prophet also asked some questions from the leaders of the delegation. It was a kind of debate and a dialogue between Muslims and Christians. And after that they agreed upon an agreement. He further adds that it was the first regular interlink between Muslim and Christians in the history and it can also become a basis for modern Muslim Christian dialogue and relationship."²⁹

According to another Christian scholar Jan Slomp:

He has described his arguments about *Najran's* Delegation in his article in a journal *Al-Mushir*:

He says that "Christianity entered Arabia at an early time. The apostle Paul had already spent sometime in the Peninsula, attended two synods of Arabian Christians in which fourteen Bishops were present. The Pre-Islamic Christians were mainly *Con-Teghlides* and among the *Nabataeans* and the *Harithides* of *Najran*."³⁰

He further says: "In three places in the Holy Quran references are found to events in south Arabia or in *Najran*. These references are: 1.Sura Al-Feel, 2.Sura Al-Burooj and 3.Sura Ale-Imran."³¹

He add further:" In this particular (incident of *Najran*), in a purposely limited context, the following points should be noted:

"The prayer of Christian delegation was in the Mosque of the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*). The Prophet does not hesitate to enter into a deep religious conversation with the Christian leaders. The Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) listened to the points of view of the Christians of the *Najran*. The Christians of *Najran* were connected to the Orthodox Church.

The Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) challenged them for *Mubahala* but they did not accept it, the best possible treaty between Christians and the Prophet after the conversation."³²

In this way we know the incident of *Najran* in the age of the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) as per in Christian's perspective. In the above references we also come to know about the importance and validity of this important incident in the history.

Application of Wafad-e-Najran in the present Age:

When we deeply observe the incident of *Wafad-e-Najran* we find many principles which guide us towards the Muslim- Christian dialogue in modern age. First of all, the principles of the practical application and then modern Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Common values in dialogue:

According to the dialogue experts common values are necessary for successful dialogue. This incident gives us many common values between Muslims and Christians. For example: *Tauhid*, The Book, *Shri'ah*, Prophet - Hood, Miracles, prayer, Jesus Christ, Mary, (*Syeda Maryam* (A.S) Revelation and Ethical values etc. Muslim and Christians find these values in their Scriptures (The Holy Quran, The Holy Bible).

Allah says in Holy Quran:

"وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ"

"To thee we sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety."³³

Quran discusses in detail the *Seerah* of *Syida Maryiam* (Mary), Jesus Christ (A.S.) and his Miracles.

As Allah States in the Glorious Quran:

"إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ"

"Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah.

He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous."³⁴

The Holy Bible also tells us about Monotheism (*Tauhid*).

As Jesus Christ says:

"And the scribe said unto him, 'well Master thou has said the truth: for there is One God; and there is none other but He."³⁵

We also see some prophesies about the Holy Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) in the Bible.

As Jesus says in the Bible:

"If you Love me, keep my Commandments and I will pray the father (God) and He shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever."³⁶

Muslim theologians and scholars say that "another comforter" is the Prophet Muhammad (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*).

Mufti Muhammad *Shafi Usmani* Says about this Verse:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ"

"We find in this verse an important principle of preaching, and it is that when you want to preach a group which is different from your own faith then you call him on the common point as the Holy Prophet wrote a letter to *Hariqal* the King of Rome."³⁷

In this regard Quran invites them to a very common thing which is *Tauhid* (Monotheism). Allah Says in the Quran:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا"

Therefore, these common values can become the base of modern Muslim-Christian dialogue and in this way we can implement this incident in the modern age. And it is also a strong base for Christian-Muslim relationship.

Respect and honour to others:

Respect and honor is another important aspect in a successful dialogue. We find this aspect in this incident very much. The Holy Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) gave much respect and honor to the Christian delegation. For example when they reached in *Madinah*, the Holy Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) welcomed them himself. Especially at the time of the prayer, the Prophet permitted them for prayer in his mosque (*Masjid Al-Nabawi*).

According to Christian Scholar Jan Slop:

"When the Prophet companion objected to the fact that *Najranies* pray in the Mosque in Medina Muhammad (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) told them not to hinder them but to leave them alone."³⁸

Qazi Muhammad *Sulaiman Mansoorpuri* also mentions this thing in his book.

He says: "when they reached the time of their prayer having come they stood and prayed in the apostle's Mosque, some Muslims wanted to stop them but He said that they were to be left to do so. They prayed to wards east."³⁹

Allah also mentions this noble principle in the Quran. Allah says:

"وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ"

"And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation)."⁴⁰

Another place in the holy Quran Allah states as:

"وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ"

"Reville not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance."⁴¹

No doubt in this way Allah Almighty gives much respect and honour to Jesus Christ in the Holy Quran.

As a Christian Theologian Geoffrey Parrinder says:

"The Quran gives a great number of honorable titles to Jesus then to any other figure of the past. He is a sign, a mercy, a witness and an example."⁴²

Consequently, in this way we find a good principle of mutual respect and honor for successful dialogue and this principle we can also implement in the contemporary age of globalization.

Principle of Wisdom and beautiful arguments:

We also find in this incident principle of wisdom and psychology. When the *Wafad-e-Najran* reached, the Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) left them and discussed with them in the next day that they did rest and prepared themselves for conversation. During the conversation, the Prophet did not attack them but asked them some questions and they asked some question to the Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*). As the *Seerah* writers has mentioned this point in their books.

The Holy Quran also mentions this very important principle of dialogue.

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ"

"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."⁴³

A famous Scholar *Ameen Ahsan Islahi* says:

So Quran starts its *Da'wah* from this common thing...this way of conversation is according to this Verse of Quran:

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ"

"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching."

And the special aspects of this way are that when you find a common thing with the audiences then call them on this point."⁴⁴

According to professor Abdul *Jabbar Shakir* :

"Every party should present his point of view with evidences and wisdom because some time this behavior becomes a turning point for other."⁴⁵

Therefore, we also implement this principle of wisdom and psychology in modern word in interfaith dialogue of Muslim and Christians.

Interfaith Diversity:

We also find religious diversity from this incident because after the conversation the two parties had made an agreement and this agreement remained when the Muslim became ruler. In fact Islam gives rights of existence to other religion because there is no compulsion in Islam.

As Allah states in the Glorious Quran:

"لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ"

"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error."⁴⁶

At another place Quran says:

"لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ"

"Say: O ye that reject faith: To you be your Way, and to me mine."⁴⁷

According to majority of Muslim theologians this *Surah* is the evidence of religious diversity in Islam. Therefore, Islam supports religious diversity with some rules and regulations. Even Islam saves their rituals and worship places and one purpose of Islamic jihad is the security of worship- places.

According to the Holy Quran:

"وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا"

"Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure."⁴⁸

Ones can see when the Muslims were rulers, the worship-places of other religions were safe and history is the better witness of this thing.

Interfaith Peace and Harmony:

This historical incident gives us a principle of peace, tolerance and interfaith "harmony"⁴⁹. As we know when the *Najran* delegation came to *Madinah* the Holy Prophet called them for Islam but they do not accept it and in the end of the conversation the two parties reached on an agreement which was the surety of peace, tolerance and harmony.

As we know when the Prophet said to them:

"When the two divines spoke to him the apostle said to them; submit you. They said we have submitted, He said you have not submitted so submit. They said 'nay' but we submitted before you."⁵⁰

The delegation did not accept Islam but made a respectable treaty which was the best between two parties.

As a Christian writer A Guillaume says:

"The best possible treaty between Christians and the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) after the conversation under the circumstances."⁵¹

Syed Ameer Ali also writes:

"Has any conquering race of faith given to its subject nation- allies a better guarantee then is to be found in the following words of the Prophet ?" to the Christian of *Najran*".⁵²

Quran also mentions a special rule for the Christians especially.

Allah says in the Quran:

"وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قُسَيْسِينَ وَرَهَبَانًا."

"And (you will find) nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world."⁵³

Accordingly, we find from this incident, principle of peace and harmony and we can implement this rule in the modern Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Mutual understanding and communication:

This important incident also provides us another base for religious dialogue which is mutual understanding and communication. We see when the Christian delegation reached in *Madinah* they asked some questions to the Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) and the Holy Prophet (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) asked some questions to them so in this way they understood mutual point of view.

According to *Seerah Ibn -Hisham*:

"(The three leaders of them debated with Prophet)The Christians to the Byzantine rite, through they differ among themselves in some points, Saying he (Jesus) God; and he is the son of God; and he is the third person of the trinity ,which is the doctrine of the Christianity."⁵⁴

The Holy Prophet also asked them some questions. He said: "Your assertion is that God has a son, you worship the cross and yours eating pork hold, you back from submission."⁵⁵

In this way the two groups have presented their point of view and understood it, because the dialogue is the best way to understand each other and to communicate each other.

As Dr. *Ataullah Sissiqui* says:

"The major area of dialogue is about mutual understanding and communication."⁵⁶

It means a relationship with the other faith communities in order to understand their religious beliefs and their ways of life and how their faiths affect their attitude towards mankind in general.

Prof. Abdul Jabbar Shakir says about the purpose of dialogue:

"The purpose of dialogue should not to defeat or to disgrace the opposite party but understand the affairs and mutual rectification."⁵⁷

So, this incident also provides us a good principle of mutual understanding and communication and we can implement it in the modern age.

Da'wah and the Completion of proof (Hujjah):

Completion of proof and *Da'wah* is a significant principle of that incident. As a Muslim it is our duty to convey the message of Islam to others. For this purpose dialogue, conversation and debate is an important tool. For this purpose, the Prophet wrote a letter to the Christian of *Najran*.

According to a prominent Muslim Scholar Dr. Ali Muhammad as-sallaabee:

"He describes about this incident that the Messenger of Allah (*Sallallaho Alaihe Wasallam*) wrote a letter to the Christians of *Najran*, a letter that consists of following message:"to proceed. Verily, I invite you to turn away from the

worship of slaves and to embrace to the worship of Allah. And I invite you to turn away from showing loyalty to slaves and to show complete loyalty to Allah. If you refuse you must pay the *Jizyah* (Tax) and if you refuse that then I declare war up on you."⁵⁸

One thing should keep in mind that to convey the message and promote the Preaching is our religious duty.

Allah says in the Quran:

"كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ"

"Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith."⁵⁹

According to the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) preaching of Islam is duty of every Muslim.

As the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) says:

"بلغوا عني ولو بآية"

"You convey the Message although it is one Verse."⁶⁰

Islam wants to present the logic and argument in front of the people that there would not remain any excuse in this world and on the Day of Judgment in front of them.

As Allah says in the Glorious Quran:

"هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ"

"It is He Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation); that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and ye be witnesses for mankind!"⁶¹

Preaching of Islam should be our basic and first priority during a dialogue.

AS Dr. *Ataullah Siddique* says:

"Muslim participation in dialogue needs be seen first in a theological perspective and second as an encounter with Christianity in the contemporary situation."⁶²

It was the influence of this *Da'wah* that some senior members of the delegation came back from *Najran* to *Madinah* and some of them accepted Islam.

As a famous Muslim writer Muhammad Ibne-Saad says: "When they went back to *Najran*, two of them *Syed* and *Aqib* came back to *Madinah* and accepted

Islam. The Holy Prophet (SAW) respected them and settled them in the house of Abu-Ayyuobe Ansari (R.A.).

Conclusion:

These are some basic principles and characteristics which can be assumed from the incident of *Wafad-e-Najran*. These principles can also be implemented in the present Muslim-Christian Dialogue. Furthermore, without these characteristics the Muslim –Christian dialogue will be incomplete and fruitless, but unfortunately the modern dialogue lacks these characteristics.

The *Seerah* of the Prophet (*Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam*) also gives an essential guideline for dialogue in contemporary age. Moreover, the present Interfaith Dialogue cannot be proved fruitful until we revised its issues, dimensions and priorities. Consequently, the present interfaith Dialogue should be conducted according to the excellent rules of *Wafad-e-Najran*.

References:

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 - ⁶ **Translation:** The English translation of Quran is taken from famous scholar Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali.
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 - ⁹ *Ibn kathir*, Hafiz Abu al-fida Ismail, Emmad-ud- Din, , *Tafsir Ibn kathir* , Darussalam, Riyadh, 2003, Vol.2. , P.182.
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