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A MUSLIM THEOLOGIAN'S APPROACH TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY: THE CASE OF QADI 'ABD AL-JABBAR*

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Abstract

Since the birth of Islam, Muslims and Christians have been in close contact and they have lived together. This coexistence brought about awareness of each other from daily lives to religious beliefs. Accordingly, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, a Mu'tazili theologian who died in 1025, deemed it necessary to introduce and describe different Christian sects (Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites) that were living together with Muslims during his life in doctrinal terms. He detected that they were common in adopting the doctrine of the Trinity whereas they interpreted it differently. He criticized this unanimous belief of these Christian sects, taking the Qur'an and reason as his bases. For him, the doctrine of the Trinity, which cannot be approved by the Qur'an due to the centrality of the unity of God in it, is also rationally incoherent, and thus a belief that contradicts the Qur'an and reason cannot be accepted. However, such a conclusion was not an obstacle for the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in the past, and should not be in the present.

Keywords: Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Tawhid* (The unity of God), *Tanzih* (The perfection of God), The Christian sects, The Trinity, Interfaith Dialogue.

Introduction

Since the first years of the advent of Islam, Muslims and Christians have been in contact in various ways, ranging from daily transactions to theological discussions as a corollary to social life (Thomas, 2001: 78-80). According to Islamic sources, a Christian delegation from the city of Najran (Northern Yemen) came to Madina to visit Muhammad in 631 and asked him questions about Jesus. Thereupon, the first eighty verses of the 3rd chapter of the Qur'an, "The Family of 'Imran", were revealed and Muhammad responded to the questions of the delegation with the help of these verses (Ibn Hisham, no date: 222-225; Guillaume, 1978: 270-277; Fayda, 1975: 143-149; Fayda, 2006: 425; Hamidullah, 1985: 174-191). If we accept these reports as authentic, this event might count as the first example of a theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

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There is mention of three Christian sects known as Nestorians¹, Jacobites², and Melkites³ in works of Islamic Heresiography (*milal wa nihal*), classical theology books and refutations of the Christians written by Muslim scholars.⁴ According to these Islamic sources, the aforementioned Christian sects agree that the Creator God consists of a single substance and three hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, these sects adhere to different ideas concerning the relationship between the substance of the Trinity and the hypostases, and the true nature of the Son, Jesus Christ (Sinanoğlu, 2004: 84).

Muslim scholars regarded the beliefs of these Christian sects as contradictory to the basic tenets of Islam and they tried to demonstrate the incoherence of these beliefs by taking the Qur'an and reason as their bases. In this framework, they examined the debates about the Trinity, incarnation, Jesus' divinity and his crucifixion, the distortion of earlier Scriptures and Jesus' role as a harbinger of Muhammad (Demiri, 2006: 79-80; Kaplan, 2008: 133).

It is certain that *tawhid* is a preferred appellation for the understanding of divinity for Muslims (Swanson, 2005: 256), since Islam came as a religion to re-establish the unity of God in the belief world of human beings. As the unity of God is a concept of great sensitivity for Muslims, every thought and interpretation that is in tension with this belief has faced severe opposition. As a result, it can be said that the doctrine of the Trinity has been at the center of theological debates between Muslims and Christians.

In this work, I will cover the approach to the Trinity of Abu al-Hasan Qadi Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad (d. 1025), an adherent of the Mu'tazili School of theology which proclaims *tawhid* as its central focus, emphasizes a strict differentiation between God and His creatures, and calls its adherents *Ahl al-Tawhid wa al-'Adl* "People of God's Unity and Justice" (Işık, 1967: 50; Thomas, 2001: 87; Swanson, 2005: 257). Benefiting from a cultural heritage produced by earlier Mu'tazili scholars around refutations of Christian theology and primarily of the Trinity by way of taking the unity of God as the basis for critique, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar was well-versed in different religions and religious trends, and particularly about Christianity, thanks to his milieu and occupation (Reynolds, 2004: 19-74, 189; Reynolds, 2003: 218-221). As far as current research is concerned, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is not dealt with elaborately. This paper attempts to fill in this lacuna.

¹ It is a Christian community also known as the Eastern Assyrian or the Assyrian Church named after Nestorius (d. 451), who was born in 382, educated in the Seminary of Antioch, became famous for his fierce struggle against heresy in various parts of Anatolia, was appointed as the patriarch of Constantinople by the Emperor Theodosius II, and was excommunicated because he rejected the idea that Mary is the God-bearer (Theotokos) at the Council of Ephesus that was held in 431. According to Nestorians, Jesus is not of one nature as the Monophysites claim but he is of two natures and he is both divine and human. Moreover, while Catholic, Orthodox and Monophysite Churches regard Mary in an exalted position as the God-bearer (Theotokos), Nestorians regard her as the Christ-bearer (christotokos) or the human-bearer (anthropotokos). For a detailed analysis, see (Aydın, 1989: 121-124; Griffith, 2008: 131-134; Albayrak, 2007: 15-17).

² Named after the patriarch of Urfa (Edessa), Yaqub Baradai (d. 578), Jacobitism represent Monophysites in general. Some radical Jacobites believe that, although Jesus had two natures at the beginning, his human nature disappeared over time and the divine nature dominated over him completely. See (Aydın, 1989: 124-127; Griffith, 2008: 133-137; Bertaina, 2008: 18).

³ Monophysite Christians, who emphasized the divine nature of Jesus and rejected the ordinances of the Council of Chalcedon that was held in 451 and that confirmed the diophysite view, gave this name to those who lived in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch Episcopal regions where they were the majority and adopted the ordinances of that council; "Melkites" means "the proponents of the Byzantine Emperor and supporters of the Council." In the Council of Chalcedon, it had been established that Jesus has two natures which are not divided, united and separated and which are not subject to change. As such, Melkites are different both from Nestorians who emphasize the human aspect of Jesus and from Monophysites who emphasize his divine nature. Melkitism is known to be the form of Christianity which was to be divided into Catholic and Orthodox churches. See (Aydın, 1989: 127-128; Griffith, 2008: 137-139; Griffith, 2001: 11-12; Bertaina, 2008: 18; Sinanoğlu, 2004: 84-85).

⁴ For doctrinal debates among these sects, see (Griffith, 2001: 9-55).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's Stance Towards the Doctrine of the Trinity

There is no decisive information in the sources about whether Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar wrote an independent work along the lines of a refutation of Christianity. Nevertheless, he assigns quite a few pages to Christianity in the fifth tome of his voluminous work *al-Mughni fi Abwab al-Tawhid wa al-'Adl* and in his *Tathbitu Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, and he also touches upon it in his other works when the occasion arises (Arslan, 2010: 14). It can be said that in places where he tackles the doctrine of the Trinity, his approach revolves around two successive methods, a descriptive and a critical one (Thomas, 2008: 208). Accordingly, I will provide some examples of how Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar describes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and then I will attempt to elucidate his critiques of it.

a. *The Doctrine of the Trinity Among Christian Sects According to Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar*

Renowned as a sophisticated and investigative scholar, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar made a general schema of issues that Christians agreed upon and disputed by taking the different sects (Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites) that lived around his milieu into account. It is worth noting that, in *Mughni* he reports the positions of the aforementioned sects with regard to the Trinity without interpreting or passing judgment ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 80-85; Thomas, 2008: 209).

At the very beginning of his account in *Mughni*, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar summarizes the treatise that a prominent Mu'tazili scholar Abu 'Ali Al-Jubba'i (d. 915)⁵ wrote about the opinions of Christian sects regarding the Trinity. However, it can be discerned that he finds this treatment inadequate because, after reporting it, he continues by saying: "Know that it is necessary to establish the positions of Christian sects and to explain in detail the matters that they agree and disagree upon" ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 80). Having stated that Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites are the prevailing Christian groups in Islamic lands, he mentions that there are other dissident groups that existed before or after the advent of these three. Then he starts off with the points that these sects agree upon and says:

The Creator God is one single substance consisting of three hypostases. The first of these hypostases is the Father, the second one is the Son and the third is the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Word; the Spirit is the Life and the Father is Living, Speaking and All-Eternal. These three hypostases are common in their essential nature but they are different in their hypostatic nature. Eternally the Son is the Begotten One of the Father; The Father is the Begetting One of the Son; and the Spirit is the Overflow of the Father and the Son. The Son is not the Son of the Father in terms of breeding; His being the Son of the Father is like the word being from reason, the warmth being from the fire and the light being from the sun ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 81).⁶

Furthermore, having stated that these sects agree on the facts that the Son united (*ittahada*) with a person called Jesus Christ, this person was present among people, was crucified and was killed, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar says that there are many disagreements among them. For him, Nestorians and Jacobites argue that the hypostases are the same with the substance and the substance is the same with the hypostases, whereas Melkites argue that the Eternal One is one substance having three hypostases and the substance is different from the hypostases and vice versa ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 81-82). In other words, according to Nestorians and Jacobites, God consists only of three hypostases but for Melkites God has a simple, not a compound, substance along with three hypostases. However, this substance does not constitute a fourth element in terms of reckoning. This substance is the same with the disposition and the being, but hypostases are different from each other ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 82; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 91, 111).

⁵ About Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i's view on the doctrine of the Trinity, see (Thomas, 2010: 279-313).

⁶ For a similar explanation, see ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 104).

Reminding us that Christians have different views about the true nature of hypostases, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar continues:

Some of them say, "hypostases are properties," others say, "they are personalities," and yet others say, "each of them is an aspect and attribute." As such, they acknowledge one substance, three properties and three persons. Some of them argue that they are same in essential nature and different in hypostatic nature whereas others say, "we do not say that they are different but we argue that three hypostases are the one and the same substance." Yet another group claims that each one of the hypostases is a living and logos-bearing (*natiq*) god and this is the view of some Nestorians ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 82).

Without specifying which group adheres to which of the views above, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar says that, according to Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites, each and every hypostasis of God has some features that differentiate it from the others. For example, the attributes of the hypostasis of the Father include his being Begetting not Begotten, Eternal, Creating and Sustaining One. The attributes of the hypostasis of the Son include his being the Begotten not Begetting, Eternal, Creating and Sustaining One. The Holy Spirit, however, is neither Begotten nor Begetting but is the Eternal, Living, Creating and Sustaining One. Furthermore, the hypostasis of the Son leads to the birth of the God Jesus Christ from Mary as a result of His descent from the Heavens and His embodiment in Mary through the Holy Spirit ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 91-92, 145-146; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 2010: 1-2).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar states that Christians have varying views about the Christ and says:

Nestorians claim that the Christ is both God and human, both the blessing and the blessed one, and the combination of these forms the one and the only Christ. For them, the Christ actually consists of two substances and two hypostases: the Eternal substance is the Word which is one of the hypostases of God; the Created substance is Jesus who is created ex nihilo and born of Mary. They express this situation sometimes with the verbs *ittahada* (He was united) and *tajassada* (He was embodied) and sometimes with the verbs of *ta'annasa* (He became human) and *tarakkaba* (He was composed). Melkites argue that Christ consists of two substances, an eternal and a created one. The majority of Jacobites opine that Christ consists of one substance but this becomes one substance and one hypostasis with the combination of two substances, an Eternal Divine and a human one. Some others argue that this is one nature ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 82-83).

It is clear that according to Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar Nestorians have a diophysite view and they argue that Jesus is a Messiah of dual nature, composed of a divine and human one. Similarly, Melkites argue that the Christ is made of two substances, one being Eternal and the other Created. However, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar reports, Jacobites adhere to a monophysite view of the Christ. They assert that the Christ is made of one substance which is a transformation of two substances, and for them the eternal divine substance is joined with the human substance and forms one substance, one hypostasis or one nature. In other words, Jacobites, unlike other sects, argue that Jesus has one nature and He is God Himself. For them, Jesus had both a divine and a human nature at the beginning. However, the divine nature dominated over his humanness completely and he is left only with the divine aspect. For this reason, for Jacobites, Christ is God Himself as the hypostasis of the Son and Mary is not human but the God-bearer. ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 96, 145, 146; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 2010: 9-10).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar remarks that the majority of Jacobites believe that the Christ had a divine and a human nature at the beginning but later the divine nature held sway over him. As such, he represents only the hypostasis of the Son. The crucifixion and death befell the Christ who was God. The rest of the Jacobites believe that the Christ is an eternal and divine substance from one aspect and a begotten human being from another aspect. Regarding the first aspect, he did not die and suffer, but with respect to the second one he was crucified as a human being and died on the spot. His death, crucifixion and suffering mentioned here were not certain and they occurred differently from what appeared on the level of perception (*haylulat*). That is

because it is inconceivable for the Christ to suffer since He is combined with an immaterial substance. In that respect, according to Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, some of the Jacobites believe that the Christ is God whereas others believe that God emerged out of his humanness. Thus, the human side of the Christ becomes the locus where God manifested himself ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 84).

At this point, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar notes a significant peculiarity of Nestorians vis-à-vis the other two sects. For them, the Christ acquired two personalities as a result of the incarnation. His divine aspect represents one person and his human aspect represents another ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 262). Since Nestorians believe that the human aspect of the Christ includes human characteristics, he is subject to improvement and diminution. However, the divine nature of Jesus cannot be a locus for such attributes. Thus, two different substances cannot be regarded as one person. The Christ is God and human and Mary gave birth to the Christ who is human ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 82, 83). Some human attributes, like eating and drinking, that happen to be in the person of Jesus have to do with his human nature ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 296).

As a result, according to Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, the main point of disagreement among Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites has to do with the connection between the two natures which are believed to exist in Jesus; or putting it differently, it has to do with the understanding and interpretation of the union between the human and the divine nature ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 105).⁷

Having reported the views of Christians on the properties of the substance and the hypostases that form the Trinity and the relationship between them, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar says that all three sects agree that the Son united with a person called the Christ, that he was crucified for the sins of human beings and that he died there ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 80-81).⁸ He also adds that all Christians without exception believe that Jesus Christ is true God coming from God and having the same substance with God ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 102-103; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 94). Indeed, all three sects believe that Jesus Christ is God ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 96, 145, 146).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar says that the credo of the members of these three sects at his time was: "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, firstborn of his Father, he is not made; true god from true god, from substance of his Father; by whom the worlds were brought to perfection and everything was created." He also notes that by praying "You, O Christ Jesus, bring us to life, and provide for us. You create our children and will resurrect our bodies" they attribute to Jesus Christ actions that Muslims attribute to Allah, and thus regard him as the only God ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 111; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 2010: 32).

As Sidney Griffith argues, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar is one of the best observers among Muslim theologians of the doctrinal differences among Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites; he examined them with great meticulousness (Griffith, 2008: 140-141). Before criticizing ideas like the doctrine of the Trinity, which could confuse the members of the Muslim society, he makes it a must for himself to learn in detail about the doctrine of the Trinity among the Christian sects of his time. Relying on this background, he compares the doctrine of the Trinity with the basic tenet of Islam, *tawhid* or the unity of God, and puts forward his critiques of it.

b. Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's Criticism of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Before delving into the criticisms that Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar directs towards the doctrine of the Trinity, it is appropriate to look at some of the key verses that have to do with the issues of the unity of God and the Trinity in the Qur'an, which is a basic source that defines the perspective and the world view of every Muslim, including Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar himself.

⁷ Further see, (Griffith, 2001: 54).

⁸ Further see (Sinanoğlu, 2004: 84).

The fundamental focus of the Qur'an from beginning to the end, is on the unity of God,⁹ His distinctness from every other being, and His uniqueness and matchlessness. Thus, what is expected from the human being before everything else is a declaration of God's unity in an unequivocal manner. In other words, *tawhid* means acknowledging the existence and the unity of Allah, knowing that all perfect attributes are concentrated on Him and that He is unique and matchless and finally believing in Him. The doctrine of *tawhid* is expressed in the Qur'an with a striking wording in the 112th chapter of the Qur'an "*Ikhlas*" (Sincerity) as follows:

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.¹⁰ (Yusuf Ali)

The expression "*ahad*" in the phrase of *Allahu ahad* in the first verse of *Ikhlas* means "being unique". In other words this expression means "that which has no equal or similar". This is mentioned in another verse: "There is nothing whatever like unto Him".¹¹ It is inconceivable for a Muslim to ignore the emphasis on the unity of God and the perfection (*tanzih*) of Him explicitly given in this verse and in the Chapter of *Ikhlas* as a whole, while evaluating his or her tenets of faith.

As for the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity, one can observe that the Qur'an takes up this belief as the multitude of gods. The most striking verse about this is the following (Thomas, 2001: 85):¹²

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.¹³

It is clear that some form of Trinitarian understanding, which is taken to be polytheism, is rejected explicitly in this verse. Besides, the Qur'an rejects the implication that the hypostasis of the Father is given an elevated status among the hypostases by saying, "they do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah".¹⁴ In another verse, there is an implicit expression that Christians take Mary as God together with Jesus and thus consider her as one of the hypostases that constitute the Trinity:

And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden."¹⁵

It can be ascertained from the verses above that the doctrine of the Trinity is incongruous with the unity of God according to the Qur'an. It goes without saying that the Qur'an, having an incomparably crucial place in the shaping of the mindset and the viewpoint of a Muslim, is primarily operative for the approach of a Muslim theologian like Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar to the Trinity (Reynolds, 2004: 94, 100). For him, the difference between the sects which deify Jesus and Mary or believe in three gods of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is not really significant for the Qur'an. That is because what is principal for the Qur'an is the belief in

⁹ For example see *Baqara* 2/163, 171; *Tawba* 9/31; *Ibrahim* 14/52; *Nahl* 16/51; *Kahf* 18/110; *Hajj* 23/34; *Saffat* 37/4; *Fussilat* 41/6; *Ikhlas* 112/1-4.

¹⁰ *Ikhlas* 112/1-4.

¹¹ *Shura* 42/11.

¹² About the view of the Qur'an on Christianity in general, see (Marshall, 2001: 3-29).

¹³ *Nisa* 4/171.

¹⁴ *Ma'ida* 5/73.

¹⁵ *Ma'ida* 5/116.

the absolute unity of God and the rejection of polytheism that results from the elevation of any being to the divine level ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 144-147). As such, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar regards the Trinity as a polytheistic and anthropomorphic interpretation of the unity of God, as understood in terms of Islamic thought ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 95-96; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 2010: 7-8).

The second fundamental determinant for the criticism of Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar to the doctrine of the Trinity is reason. From the viewpoint of Islamic belief, an article of faith should not be incongruent with reason and contradict its principles. In other words, the veracity of a belief requires its harmony with sound reason. Indeed, this requires being harmonious with human nature and disposition (Atay, 1998: 14-15; Düzgün, 1998: 83-85, 131-132). This issue is extremely important for the sect of Mu'tazilism, the group to which Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar belongs, because the basic principles of the Qur'an that they base their ideas upon are universal, and it is possible to prove them by reason. In Christian theology, however, one admits the incomprehensibility of the belief as a principle and aims at an understanding and interpretation within this framework (Frank, 1992: 18-19).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar states that the proofs of the uniqueness of the eternal being overrule the beliefs of Christians about the constitution of God in three hypostases ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 86). For him, it is inconsistent to argue that God is both one substance and three hypostases because one substance disallows division by virtue of being simple. However, a God with three hypostases that Christians believe in consists of three different elements, and this is logically incoherent. Such a belief is nothing less than claiming that one thing is both existent and non-existent or both created and eternal ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 292). Moreover, once it is accepted that each hypostasis is an eternal and necessary being, it is not supposed to have any relation whatsoever with other hypostases. Since each of the three hypostases is defined as equally divine, the emergence of the concept of a dependent God becomes inevitable. If it is conceded that the hypostases are totally independent, then one reaches the conclusion that there are three gods, not one ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 295).

Actually, for Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, the biggest problem in the belief in the God of Christians is that they argue for the eternity of all three constituent elements of the Trinity, whereas being eternal is actually the quality that distinguishes God from other beings. If one admits that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all eternal, there would be no qualification that separates them from each other. In that case, the Son should be the Father; similarly, the Father should be the Spirit, and the Spirit should be the Father ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 86). In the case that the hypostases are common in this quality of being eternal which necessitates similarity, it would be necessary for the Father to have a Son and a Spirit, the Son to have a Spirit, and the Spirit to have a Son. Although they claim eternity for all three hypostases, it is impossible for Christians to explain from a rational standpoint why the Father needs a Son and why the Son and the Holy Spirit do not ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 87).¹⁶

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar states, without mentioning any names, which some prominent Mu'tazili scholars provided convincing responses to Christians who argued that each one of the hypostases is a God, and continues:

If the Son and the Holy Spirit are partners of the Father in being Eternal, the thing that requires the Father to be God necessitates for the Son and the Holy Spirit to be gods as well. The conviction that all three are gods, in turn, takes away the ground of their views. That is because they arrived to this understanding through the idea of an Eternal Agent. Since it is impossible for the Eternal Agent to be alive without life and omniscient without knowledge, one has to admit two hypostases of the Word and the Spirit. As we mentioned earlier, this is also invalid since each hypostasis is supposed to be a God. Besides, there should be two other hypostases for each hypostasis. There should be two further hypostases for these two as well and this leads to the acceptance of endless gods ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 87-88).

¹⁶ Further see (Sinanoğlu, 2010: 20).

Carrying on the discussion by benefiting from the repertoire of the Mu'tazili school about the impossibility of elucidating the doctrine of the Trinity according to reason, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar argues that attempting to explain the assumption of three as one through one consisting of three or otherwise does not change anything, and that three being one and one being three in reality go against the principles of reason ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 89). Besides, for him, it is inconsistent to claim that the Eternal Being is both composed of different elements and single-bodied at the same time. If It is composed of hypostases it must be a combination of different elements, and if It is made of one substance, It must be single-bodied. However, it is impossible for beings to be both composed of different elements and single-bodied at the same time. It is equally unlikely for beings to be single-bodied in terms of their essence and a composite of different elements in terms of the attributes of the essence. Such a claim necessitates arguing the existence and the non-existence of the same being, and this is not possible ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 90-91).

Having noted that the Christian interpretation of each hypostasis as distinct and separate from others leads to assigning a special position of personality for each of them ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 96), Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar opines that the hypostases cannot be compared to the attributes of Allah that exist in Islamic thought. In case the hypostases are assumed to be persons, one cannot talk about one substance because each hypostasis has to have one distinct substance. Considering the hypostases as persons, in turn, means that the person of God is composed of parts, and thus such a being can only be material. Besides, according to Christians, hypostases are not simply attributes, but they have independent positions among each other, whereas attributes must certainly be attached to a person. As a result, hypostases cannot be regarded as attributes ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 99-102). Even if the hypostases are taken to be attributes, the coalescence of attributes does not mean anything without the person since the attributes cannot exist independently. When the Father is acknowledged as a person and a source for other hypostases, He must be equated to other hypostases in terms of his eternity and divinity, but this is equally meaningless ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 104-105).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar remarks that when the issue is debated, Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites reject a tripled understanding of deity and say that they believe in one God. However, he reports that when they are asked whether these hypostases are the same among each other, they try to explain the differences among them. For example, they describe the Father as the Begetting, Living, Eternal, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Creating and Sustaining God. The Son, on the other hand, is not Begetting but the Begotten Word, the Eternal, Creating and Sustaining God, and is different from the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Living, Eternal, Omniscient, Creating and Sustaining God and is different from the Father and the Son. All three are common in their divinity. Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar argues that this is no different from saying that "The Arab 'Abdullah is a male, human, flesh and person; the Persian Khalid is a male, human, flesh and person; the Roman Zayd is a male, human, flesh and person," and that the Christian claim is equivalent to arguing that there are three gods. For him, after the views that Christians expounded about the doctrine of the Trinity, it is groundless for them to attempt to argue for the unity of God. Such a claim for the unity of God is embedded with the same contradiction as that of the Anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*) who say both that "God ascends to the Heavens, descends to the Earth, sits on the Throne" and that "there is nothing like Him" at the same time ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 95, 147; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 2010: 6-8).¹⁷

Having criticized the doctrine of the Trinity among the Christian sects by examining them as a whole, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar touches upon their differing views every now and then. For example, he evaluates the contradictions in the Melkite understanding of the Trinity:

God should be composed of the substance, not hypostases, or hypostases, not the substance. If God is substance, since the substance is different from the hypostases according to Melkites, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can no longer be divine. If they say that not

¹⁷ Further see (Marulcu, 2008: 111).

the substance but the hypostases are God, then they have to admit that the eternal substance is not God, and thus they relinquish their initial views. That is because they were arguing that God is a substance with three hypostases. Otherwise if they say that the substance and the hypostases are altogether God, then they have to say that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not God. One who worships such a being does not actually worship God, and one who denies it does not deny God. If they say, "We acknowledge that substance which has three hypostases as God," then they are told, "In that case, your view that God is composed of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is wrong because, for you, they are not God but functions that are attributed to Him." This is nothing less than stepping out of Christianity ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 97).

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar does not find the view of the Jacobites about the Trinity consistent either, since it relies on the idea that the eternal substance unites with the human substance and forms one substance, one hypostasis or one nature. For him, it is not reasonable for one being to transform into two distinct beings and vice versa. If it is perceived as reasonable for the divine and the human to form one being, it should be equally reasonable for two co-existing substances to form one single substance and for many accidents to form one accident by gathering into the same locus. Since this sounds illogical, it is also equally illogical for the divine and the human to unite and lead to one single nature ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 137-140).

Having stated that the doctrine of the Trinity for the Nestorians rests on the assumption that the Christ has two aspects, a human and a divine one ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 292), Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar specifies that for them the human aspect can be subject to increase and diminution because of its bearing human characteristics, whereas the divine aspect cannot be subject to such attributes. In that case, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar argues, Jesus should have been both God and human and both the creator and the created one. This, in turn, necessitates that the created being has the same qualities with the eternal one, whereas it is common knowledge that the eternal and the created are two exclusive categories ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 119, 121-122; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 1965: 296). Furthermore, noting that the fact that the Christ is a created human being and a servant of God is explicitly attested in the Qur'an, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar adds that there are expressions in the Gospels which can be interpreted similarly. He considers it necessary to prefer the evident interpretation when there are arguable phrases and thus to give preference to the createdness and servanthood of Jesus. For him, Christians should explain away the verses that go against this interpretation in the Gospels ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 113-114, 116-117; 'Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 110-111). That is because the unity of God and His perfection is at the center of Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's system of thought. In that respect, it is a rational obligation to explain those expressions that are incongruent with the unity of God among his attributes ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 110, 112-113).¹⁸

On the other hand, having said that the Christians mention eighty Gospels but regard only four of them as trustworthy, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar states that none of these Gospels is in the language that the Christ spoke, and thus all the Gospels are translated texts ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 153). For him, translation poses an impediment for the retrieval of correct information since it leads to slips of meaning. As a result, it is not possible to obtain decisive information from the existing Gospels ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 110). Besides, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar notes that languages have their own idiosyncrasies by saying:

A translator is supposed not only to know the facts and the metaphors of both languages but also to be well-versed about the expressions that are rationally appropriate and inappropriate to be used or thought when it comes to God. That is because a word might be used both literally and figuratively in a language whereas it might be only literal in another one. Thus, a translator who transmits a word in its literal meaning although it is used figuratively in its original language makes a grave mistake ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 111).

Thus, by pointing out the error of translating figurative phrases into literal ones in another language, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar states that, while referring to the Gospels, it is all the

¹⁸ About Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's theory of interpretation, see (Yilmaz, 2009: 23-51).

more difficult to grasp the literal and figurative meanings while translating a text which is problematic in terms of authenticity ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 111). For example, he does not approve the interpretation such as phrases of "the Father" and "the Son" as God and Jesus by assigning a figurative meaning to them. He also invalidates the Christian analogy of likening the emergence of the Son from the Father to the emergence of the word from the intellect, warmth from a fire, and light from the sun. That is because, for him, there is no point of valid parallelism between the claim that the Christians expound and the examples that they give. To demonstrate the ineptness of such a comparison, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar says that the word is not born of reason because it can originate from those who don't have reason, and those who never utter a word may have reason ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 102-103).

Having noted that Jesus strove to establish the belief in the unity of God in the minds of people, following in the footsteps of Abraham, Moses, Aaron and David, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar warns that Christians commit a grave offense for distorting this belief ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1966: 115-116, 429-430). He also emphasizes that reason necessitates submission to the unity of God, not to the Trinity ('Abd al-Jabbar, 1958: 143).¹⁹ In short, it is obvious that for Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar the Trinity is a belief that runs counter to both the Qur'an and reason because, from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the incarnation, i.e. God's making Himself visible in this world through a body, is in conflict with the uniqueness, absoluteness and transcendent nature of God. Furthermore, it is not possible and not reasonable as well for the divine and the human or the eternal and the created one to combine and form one single being.

Conclusion

Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar approaches the doctrine of the Trinity, which has been at the center of theological debates between Muslims and Christians since the years just before the death of Muhammad, with successive methods of description and criticism. He deemed it necessary to introduce and describe the faith world of the Christian sects which have encountered Muslims since the birth of Islam at various levels, coexisted with Muslims after the expansion of Islam, were involved in bilateral discussions, and lived together with Muslims, especially in those places where Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar lived. He detected that although they are different in understanding and interpreting it, these sects are unanimous in adopting the doctrine of the Trinity.

On a second tier, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar criticizes the doctrine of the Trinity that the Christian sects adopt unanimously. Here the fact that he relies on two bases stands out: the first being the Qur'an, and the second being reason. The fundamental source that determines the perspective of every Muslim individual, i.e. the Qur'an, emphasizes the unity of God all along. Thus, "loyalty to the one God implies and requires, for the Muslims, rejection of the Trinity" (Swanson, 2005: 256). This stance can be observed inevitably in Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's approach. He examines the doctrine of the Trinity, by relying on reason, detects its inconsistencies, and arrives at the conclusion that a belief that runs counter to reason cannot be accepted. His critical take on the doctrine of the Trinity should not be considered as a flight from searching for the truth (Reynolds, 2004: 131) or an attempt to undermine Christianity step by step (Reynolds, 2004: 127, 244), but as an effort to inform and raise awareness among the Muslim community who lived side by side with their Christian counterparts. In other words, it is more appropriate to conclude that his aim was to ground the doctrine of the unity of God by defending Islamic beliefs and that his critiques were of an apologetic nature to advocate for the unity of God rather than to be polemical or refutational. Indeed, the fact that Muslim scholars deduced that the doctrine of the Trinity is groundless with respect to reason was not an obstacle in the past for Muslims and Christians to coexist within the same milieu.²⁰

¹⁹ Further see (Thomas, 2003: 252).

²⁰ See (Griffith, 2008: 94-96, 145-148, 156-159, 176-179; Lamoreaux, 2000: 6-7, 24).

People today have many media of transportation and communication, and individuals or groups from different religious backgrounds are obliged to encounter and even live with each other much more than earlier times. In that respect, it is necessary to underline the following points: for Muslims, professing the unity of God is the basis of their religion and an indispensable principle. It is inconceivable for a Muslim to rule it out. The Trinity might be seen in a similar light as the basis and fundamental aspect of religion for Christians. Besides, since religion is a matter of faith, not one of reason, it is known that human beings tend to adopt beliefs that satisfy their hearts. This comes with the assumption that those who adopt a religion have the right to defend it in doctrinal terms. It is not going to be possible to secure theological dialogue among religions as long as the proponents of different religions insist on the truthfulness of their beliefs while attacking the beliefs of others. Considering the verse "you shall have your religion and I shall have my religion"²¹ it can be said that people can live together peacefully if they submit to mutual respect and acknowledge each other as they are. In that respect, theological debates among religions must remain in scientific and academic circles, and they should not hinder cooperation in other fields to secure the peace of humankind.

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²¹ *Kafirun* 109/6.

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