ΣΥΝΑΦΕΙΑ, a Key-Word in the Thinking of Nicholas Cabasilas.
Malene Thorborg.

In the first book of his magnificent work ἝΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ ζωή 1) Nicholas Cabasilas uses the word συνάφεια 22 times, and this word is with synonyms as ἔνωσις (497B) and ἐνότης (497C) to be considered a key-word perhaps not only to the first book, but in fact to the entire work.

In the beginning of the second book Cabasilas summarizes: ἔστι μὲν γὰρ ἢ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή αὐτὸ τὸ συνάφθηναι Χριστῷ (521A).

It is the way in which Cabasilas understands this συνάφεια which is one of the most striking points in his theological thinking. On the one hand the συνάφεια, the union with Christ, is ἄρσης (497B) and ὑπερφυῆς (500B) and beyond any description "ὅσε ημὲν πρὸς παράδειγμα ἀνενεκθήναι δυνατήν εἶναι" (500B), but nevertheless it seems quite clear that Cabasilas understands the union between Christ and man not in a somewhat symbolical, metaphorical way, but as a nearly sensual, physical reality. His frequent use of the word συνάφεια points to this, as does his use of other words more or less belonging to the terminology of physical love: "Εἰ δὲ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φίλτρον τοσοῦτον, τὸ θείον οὐδ’, ἐστι λογίσασθαι... Θάνω δὲ ὑπερφυοῦς δύνας τοῦ ἐρώτους, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν συνάφειαν, πρὸς ἢν συνήλασε τοὺς ἐρώτας...".

In the same line of thought we find Cabasilas' interpretation of the sacraments.

"Ἡ ἔν Χριστῷ ζωή is lived through and by the sacraments, or in his own words "Ὁ δὲ τρόπος, ὡς ταύτην ἔλαβομεν εἷς τὰς
ημετέρας ψυχάς, τούτο ἐστι τὸ τελεσθῆναι τὰ μυστήρια..." (516C) and it is in receiving the sacraments that we are united with Christ, i.e. are living ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή.

It is to be noted here that we in the very beginning of this book are told that ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή commences here and now in this life: "Ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή φύεται ἐν τῷ τῷ βίῳ καὶ τὰς ἀρ-χὰς ἐντεῦθεν λαμβάνει..." (493B).

And perhaps this is one key to the understanding of Cabasilas' strong feeling of physical reality in the union between Christ and man.

It must be emphasized again that ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή is not something happening in a celestial condition beyond this world. It is a kind of life as real as that in which it takes its beginning, and just as there are some physical conditions which make "this life" possible, such as light, air, food and so on, so the same is to be said about ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή where the sacraments are such conditions. In the baptism we see the light and are clothed by its water, by the fragrance of the chismat-ion we breathe and in the holy communion we find our food.

So the difference between the factors which constitute "this life" on the one side and ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή on the other is not to be found in a more or less physical degree but only in that while in "this life" none of the factors each taken by itself suffices to keep man living, in ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωή He himself is the one thing necessary: "ὁ δὲ εὐωθήν ὁ ὁ τοῖς ἐν αὐτῷ ἥσσοιν οὕ-τως ἀεὶ κατὰ πάντα σύνεσί τρόπον, διότε πᾶσαν χρείαν παρέχει καὶ πάντα αὕτοῖς ἐστι..." (500C) and further on: "καὶ γεννα γᾶρ καὶ ἀδεία καὶ τρέφει καὶ φῶς ἐστι καὶ πνοή....Καὶ τροφεύς ὁν καὶ τροφή ἐστι καὶ αὐτὸς μὲν ἐστιν ὁ παρέχων τὸν ἄρτον τῆς ζωῆς.... καὶ ζωή μὲν ἐστι οὕσιν, ἀναπνεοῦσι δὲ μύρον, ἱμάτιον δὲ ἐνδύσασθαι βουλομένος." (500D).
And in receiving or actually perceiving the sacraments man goes into a so to say organic union with Christ: "οὕτω δὲ γεννηθέντες καὶ καθάπερ εἴδει τινὶ καὶ μορφῇ τῷ Χριστῷ τυπωθέντες ἵνα μηδὲν ἐπεισαγάγωμεν ἀλλότριον εἴδος, τῆς ζωῆς τᾶς εἰσόδους αὐτὸς κατέχει. Καὶ δι' ὅν ἄερα καὶ τροφὴν εἰσάγοντες τῇ ζωῇ τοῦ σώματος βοηθοῦμεν, διὰ τούτων αὐτὸς εἰς τὰς ἡμετέρας εἰσ-δόται ψυχὰς καὶ τὰς θύρας ἀμφοτέρας οἰκείοιται, τῇ μὲν ὡς μῦρον καὶ εὐῳδία, τῇ δὲ ὡς τροφὴ προσήκων. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἀνα-πνέομεν αὐτὸν καὶ τροφὴ γίνεται ἡμῖν, καὶ οὕτως ἐαυτὸν διὰ πάντων ἡμῖν ἀνακερασάς καὶ ἀναμόλοσ ἐαυτοῦ ποιεῖται σῶμα..." (520A).

So this union differs from the way our senses perceive the light, air and food of "this life" only in its greater intimacy. Ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῇ seems for Cabasillas to be as much a physical reality as "this life", but the union between Christ and man is stronger and more intimate than any other human or physical connection.

In this radical feeling of the union between Christ and man as a physical reality, as something to be perceived through all our senses, in this is to be seen a primary and characteristic point in the theological thinking of Cabasillas, and the point, perhaps, in which he shows most originality.

Notes:
1) PG 150:494-520
2) 497C (5 times), 497D (3 times), 500A (3 times), 500B, 501A, 501B, 501D (twice), 508C (twice), 509D, 512C, 516D, 520B.