

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

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In the first book of his magnificent work *Η ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩ ΖΩΗ*<sup>1)</sup> Nicholas Cabasilas uses the word *συνάφεια* 22 times,<sup>2)</sup> 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 ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ αὐτὸ τὸ συναφθῆναι 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 *ἄσρητος* (497B) and *ὑπερφυσῆς* (500B) and beyond any description "*ὥστε μηδὲ πρὸς παρόδειγμα ἀνενεχθῆναι δυνατὴν 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 θεῖον οὐδ' ἔστι λογίσασθαι.... Οὕτω δὲ ὑπερφυσῆς ὄντος τοῦ ἔρωτος, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν συνάφειαν, πρὸς ἣν συνήλασε τοὺς ἐρῶντας...*".

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

*Ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ* is lived through and by the sacraments, or in his own words "*Ὁ δὲ τρόπος, ὅπως ταύτην ἔλκομεν εἰς τὰς*

ἡμετέρας ψυχᾶς, τοῦτό 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 ζωῇ.

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

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

It must be emphasized again that ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῇ 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 ζωῇ 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 ζωῇ 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 ζωῇ He himself is  
the one thing necessary : "ὁ δὲ Σωτὴρ τοῖς ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶσιν οὐ-  
τως ἀεὶ κατὰ πάντα σύνεστι τρόπον, ὥστε πᾶσαν χρεῖαν παρέχει  
καὶ πάντα αὐτοῖς ἐστι..."(500C) and further on : "καὶ γεννᾶ  
γάρ καὶ αὔξει καὶ τρέφει καὶ φῶς ἐστι καὶ πνοή...Καὶ τροφεύς  
ὢν καὶ τροφή ἐστι καὶ αὐτὸς μὲν ἐστὶν ὁ παρέχων τὸν ἄρτον τῆς  
ζωῆς.... καὶ ζωῇ μὲν ἐστι ζῶσιν, ἀναπνέουσι δὲ μύρον, ἱμάτιον  
δὲ ἐνδύσασθαι βουλομένοις." (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 εἶδει τινὶ καὶ μορφῇ τῷ Χριστῷ τυπωθέντες, ἵνα μηδὲν ἐπεισαγάγωμεν ἀλλότριον εἶδος, τῆς ζωῆς τὰς εἰσόδους αὐτὸς κατέχει. Καὶ δι' ὧν ἀέρα καὶ τροφὴν εἰσάγοντες τῇ ζωῇ τοῦ σώματος βοηθοῦμεν, διὰ τούτων αὐτὸς εἰς τὰς ἡμετέρας εἰσδύεται ψυχὰς καὶ τὰς θύρας ἀμφοτέρας οἰκείουται, τῇ μὲν ὡς μύρον καὶ εὐωδία, τῇ δὲ ὡς τροφή προσήκων. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἀναπνέομεν αὐτὸν καὶ τροφή γίνεται ἡμῖν, καὶ οὕτως ἑαυτὸν διὰ πάντων ἡμῖν ἀνακεράσας καὶ ἀναμίξας ἑαυτοῦ 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. Ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ seems for Cabasilas 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 Cabasilas, and the point, perhaps, in which he shows most originality.

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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.