

THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY OF NICOLAS CABASILAS*

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Chapter II

CHRISTOCENTRIC MYSTICISM

1. Our incorporation in Christ or the Mystical Body: the Head and Members; the Heart.

The Pauline conception of the mystical Body comes back in the whole exposition of the DE VITA IN CHRISTO. Thus, Cabasilas declares that the «Life in Christ» consists of an intimate union with Our Lord during our presence in this world. The inner man, the new man, that which is created according to the image and likeness of God,⁵⁶ attracts God's whole attention and teaching.

The union of the just and saintly man with Christ is stronger and more intimate than the ontological union of our own being.⁵⁷ Cabasilas' recapitulation is very expressive of the mystery of our incorporation in Christ and His mystical Body. It is as follows: «We are members of the Head of Christ...»⁵⁸ The conclusion as well as the starting point of his whole argumentation is that the realization of the life in Christ and union with Him begins here and is completed in the eternal life.⁵⁹

Thus, he examines the means by which we become able to live this life and to enjoy this union. They are two sorts: the action of God and our own cooperation. The role of God is examined in the first five

* Συνέχεια ἐκ τῆς σελ. 850 τοῦ προηγουμένου τόμου.

56. Cf. Eph. 4, 24; Col. 4,19; 1 Tim. 6, 12; Gal. 2, 20; 1 Cor. 6, 1.

57. Cf. Rom. 9,3. De Vita in Christo, VI, 681C; VII, 712B.

58. De Vita in Christo, I, 500 D. 520 Cf.

59. Ibid., col. 493B. 501B; Comp. Panyger. on St. Dem., Th. Ioan., op. cit., p. 79.

books of the DE VITA IN CHRISTO, whereas the role of man is developed mainly in the last two books.

Our task lies in adopting the grace, not betraying the accepted treasure, not extinguishing the lighted candle.⁶⁰ The proper task of man is to make his will always ready to perform the good and virtuous; to live according to the divine will.⁶¹ The role of God is above all, the role of Christ Himself.⁶² The Sacraments are the normal means by which Christ operates His wonders and the fruits of the Redemption in the participant souls. Through the Holy Eucharist, especially, we participate in the life of Christ, in His Passion, Death and Resurrection.⁶³

Concluding his exposition on the redemptive sufferings and death of Christ, Cabasilas declares in a tone of a persuasive personal experience: «We familiarize ourselves with the wounds and death of Christ... and we are transformed into the flesh of the dead and resurrected Christ...»⁶⁴ «...We also breath Him and we are nourished by Him so that becoming His own part and body, *anakerasas-anamixas*, we form members of his Head.»⁶⁵

We again find the same thought in his Prayer to Christ.⁶⁶

There is also another beautiful passage, abundant with a firm religious lyrism, related to the conception of the Mystical Body as Head and Members: «Διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων αὐτῷ κοινωνοῦμεν, ὅτι κεφαλὴ τὰ γὰρ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἰς σῶμα διαβαίνειν ἀνάγκη...»⁶⁷ «...τηνικαῦτα τὴν ἐλευθερίαν καὶ τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἐκομισάμεθα, καὶ μέλη τῆς μακαρίας ἐκείνης κατέστημεν κεφαλῆς. Ἐξ ἐκείνου τοίνυν, ἃ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐστί, καὶ ἡμῶν γίνεται.»⁶⁸ It should be noted that Nicolas Cabasilas emphasizes Christ's death on the Cross much more than His Incarnation as the means of our incorporation with Him. This is native to oriental thinking.

Always combining the sacramental life in Christ with the practical exercise of our own will, Cabasilas offers to us once again, at the end of the first book of the DE VITA IN CHRISTO, excellent formulas of theological equivalents and the admirable richness of his active

60. De Vita in Christo, I, 501BC, 520 CD; III 577CD; comp. IV, 605; VI, 644AB.

61. Ibid., VII, 701CD. 721 D.

62. Σύσσωμοι. Ibid., 501CD.

63. Ibid., col. 512CD.

64. Ibid., 516D-517.

65. Ibid., 520A; 500-501AB.

66. Ed. S. Salaville, in Echo, 35 (1936), p. 44f.

67. De Vita in Christo, PG. 150, 520B,

68. Ibid., 520B.

spirituality. It is, actually, the whole doctrine of grace, which is substantially summarized in this final passage:⁶⁹ Let us cite some of his remarkable expressions: «Τῶν αὐτοῦ μετέχομεν χαρίτων..., τὴν αὐτὴν ἐκείνῳ ζῶμεν ζώην... Θεοὶ περὶ Θεὸν καὶ τῶν αὐτῶ κληρονόμοι καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν αὐτῶ βασιλεύοντες βασιλείαν...» We again find the expression: «Θεοὶ περὶ Θεόν», «Gods among God» at the end of the fourth book,⁷⁰ and the sixth⁷¹ book of the DE VITA IN CHRISTO.

2. The first three Sacraments in connection with the Incorporation in Christ.

Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist constitute a sort of trilogy in our Incorporation and Union with Christ. Baptism, particularly, is the beginning of our supernatural life and being in Christ: «τὸ εἶναι δίδωσι καὶ ἔλως ὑποστῆναι κατὰ Χριστόν.»⁷²

Confirmation gives the proper movement and development of this life: «ἡ δὲ τοῦ μύρου χρίσις τελειοῖ τὸν γεγεννημένον τῇ τοιαύτῃ ζωῇ προσήκουσαν ἐνέργειαν ἐντιθεῖσα.»⁷³ The Eucharist nourishes and perfects this divine life.⁷⁴ This thoughtful composition is, obviously, based on the Pauline expression: «In Him we live and move, in Him we exist» (Acts 17, 28), even though for Cabasilas Confirmation may be repeated as a reconfirmation of apostates, since they did not lose the principle of operation and for this reason they cannot be rebaptized.⁷⁵ Thus, by these three Sacraments mainly, our Incorporation in Christ is perfected and we become His Mystical Body: «δι' αὐτῶν γεννώμεθα καὶ πλαττόμεθα καὶ ὑπερφῶς συναπτόμεθα τῷ Σωτῆρι.»⁷⁶ «Christ Himself», Nicolas says elsewhere, «operates in each one of the Sacraments; It is He Who purifies, He Who anoints, He Who nourishes. In the Baptism, He originally creates the members of the supernatural organism and purifies us from sin;⁷⁷ in Confirmation, He fortifies them by His Spirit; in the

69. Ibid., 520C.

70. Ibid., 624BC.

71. Ibid., 649C.

72. De Vita in Christo, I, 501-504.

73. Ibid., 504A.

74. Ibid., 504A.

75. Ibid., II, 545AB; Cf. M. Jugie, *Theologia Dogmatica Christianorum Orientalium*, v. III (Paris, 1930), pp. 47-53 and 194-151.

76. De Vita in Christo, I, 501-504.

77. De Vita in Christo, II, 537B, 553B; III, 569C.

Holy Table, He is really present and shares in our struggle and spiritual perfection; and after the deliverance, He Himself will be the bestower and at the same time the crown of the winners.»⁷⁸ «Αὐτός γὰρ ὁ Χριστός ἐνεργῶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν μυστηρίων... ταῦτα γὰρ συγγενεῖς ἡμᾶς ποιεῖ τῶν αἱμάτων ἐκείνων, καὶ ὧν εἴληφε διὰ τὴν σάρκα χαρίτων καὶ ὧν παθεῖν ἠέσχετο κοινωνοῦς...»⁷⁹

The basis of all of these developments lies in the analogy of the Body as Head and Members; of the Confirmation of the Christian with Christ, the adoption of the baptismal life with that of Christ Himself in the sense that it constitutes a real organism of supernatural life. This organism, as the supernatural life itself, is beyond the ordinary faculties and knowledge. Nevertheless, it is as real as the reality of Christ itself.⁸⁰

Only one thing, however, can we know: the marvellous effects of this divine life. Especially the martyrs, being baptized in their blood, felt these effects as true visible manifestations of an invisible reality. Thus, our theologian develops a magnificent theology of martyrdom, inspired by the extraordinary results of the initiative grace of Baptism, the intimate union with Christ and the inexpressible love and beauty of the souls united with Him.⁸¹

It is clearly proven from the above passage that this is the same Christ Who acts and fortifies through baptismal water as well as through the baptism of blood. It is the same grace that sanctifies and operates in these heroes and martyrs and that inflames their soul with the love of Christ, which itself is stronger than its object.⁸² It is the *mad Eros* of the divine beauty that makes their religious experience higher and more conscious than theory or speculation.⁸³ If our love for Christ does not produce in us real extraordinary effects, this proves that we lack a personal knowledge and experience of Him.⁸⁴ On the contrary, the Saints' love for Christ is of such power that it makes them able to grasp the extraordinary reality and realize things surpassing comprehension.⁸⁵

78. Ibid., IV, 608AB.

79. Ibid., II, 577BC.

80. Ibid., II, 548B-D.

81. Ibid., II, 552AB.

82. De Vita in Christo, VII, 708-709A-C.

83. Ibid., VI, 648AB; VII, 712AB.

84. Ibid., 712B-Df; I, 501B-D.

85. Ibid., II, 553A; comp. I, 500-501AB.

3. Christ, the Heart of the Mystical Body.

With the Eucharist, we further proceed in the doctrine of our Incorporation with Christ. Even though the life in Christ becomes completed in heaven alone, Cabasilas is sure that through participation in the Eucharist, we feel His real presence and dwelling in our soul, which he calls *ἔνοικος* and *οἰκία*,⁸⁶ two words of deep Cabasilian theology. Thus, the Eucharistic Christ being received by the just as *ἔνοικος* will accompany them even into the dust of their tomb⁸⁷ since He was united into and co-existed with the souls as well as with the relics of saints and martyrs: «...Ὁς καὶ ζῶσι συνῆν καὶ τελευτώντων τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐκ ἀπολιμπάνει, ἀλλὰ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἠνωμένος ἔστιν ὅπως καὶ τῇ κωφῇ ταύτῃ σύνεστι καὶ ἀναμέμιχται κόνει.»⁸⁸ The same affirmation he repeats in his prayer to Christ: «καὶ ὡσπερ αἱ ψυχὰι τὰς σὰς οἰκοῦσι χεῖρας, οὕτω καὶ τὰ σώματα σὲ φέρουσιν ἔνοικον.»⁸⁹

In order to emphasize the real presence of Christ and the real transformation of the Eucharistic elements, our theologian somehow falls into exaggerations in his terminology and comparisons. Of course, the words *ἔνοικος* and *οἰκία* are used in order to emphasize the intimate Eucharistic union and the reality of Christ's flesh and blood in the Eucharist, as a great number of Byzantine theologians and especially St. John of Damascus⁹⁰ do. These two words, *ἔνοικος* and *οἰκία*, on the other hand, express the spirit of the evangelic passage: «Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells continually in me and I dwell in him» (John 6,57).

This idea of intimacy and incorporation with Christ is emphatically repeated again and again by Cabasilas: «...Ἐνοικος γὰρ ἔστι πᾶσαν ἑαυτοῦ πληρῶν τὴν οἰκίαν... ὅλον γὰρ ἔστιν τὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ νοῦν τῷ ἡμετέρῳ συμμιξῆσαι νῶ, καὶ θελήσει θέλησιν ἐκείνην, καὶ σῶμα σώματι, καὶ αἷμα αἷματι κερασθῆναι... τοῦ γὰρ ἐν πνεῦμα μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τίς ἂν ἀκριβεστέρα γένοιτο συναφή;»⁹¹ His images and comparisons express also this affirmation: just as the olive-tree fully grafted with the wild stock (Rom. 11, 17, 24), communicates to the latter its native qualities, in the same way our justice becomes Christ-formed, *Χριστόμορφος*;

86. Ibid., IV, 581A, 548C; cf. John 6, 57.

87. De Vita in Christo, IV, 624AB.

88. Ibid., V, 636B.

89. Codey, Paris Grec., 1213, Fol. 154v. See Echo 35, (1936), p. 44.

90. De fide Orthodoxe, 2, 11. PG. 94, 916.

91. De Vita in Christo, IV, Col. 584-585.

the sacred passage: «You are Christ's body and each of you a limb or organ of it» (I Cor., 12, 27), should be attributed not only to the body, but much more to the soul;⁹² the image of the drop of water lost in the ocean of perfume; after the sacrament of marriage, the Eucharist is the unique Sacrament by which «we are flesh from His flesh and bone of His bone.»⁹³ (Gen., 2, 23) But there is a new expression in the Christocentric mysticism of Nicolas Cabasilas, which is not a simple rhetoric form but a deep theology repeated in many passages: «Christ is the Heart of the Mystical Body.» He develops this idea with a method of personal piety and experience, faithfully following the Scriptures, and particularly, Saint John and Saint Paul. We find this first reference in his beautiful passage regarding frequent communion, where the analogy of the Mystical Body is precisely obvious; Members, Head, Heart. «...We draw by the power of the Holy Table the true life from the blessed heart; we live by this power in Christ as the members in the head and heart... We are transformed into Christ Himself and we move and live in His Heart by participating in Holy Communion, since He is the living Bread, and those who eat of it shall live for ever...»⁹⁴

The sole reason why Cabasilas identifies Christ with the Heart of the Mystical Body is to emphasize that Christ communicates to us His life and power. Cabasilas deliberately and without discrimination unites the function of the heart and that of the head.⁹⁵ He does not distinguish them scholastically, even when he divides their role. We are living members of a living Christ.⁹⁶ For him the supernatural life is a divine affiliation; namely, as the Word assumed our flesh and blood in order to become our Father, in the same way we became His children by participating in His flesh and blood through Holy Communion. Cabasilas emphasizes that by Holy Communion we become not only members, but also children of Christ. On the one hand, we keep our own free will, and on the other, we are identified with Christ as members of His Body.⁹⁷ These two conceptions, i.e. of members and children, are absolutely necessary to complete Cabasilas' conception concerning the close connection with Christ.⁹⁸ As such members we re-

92. *Ibid.*, 592CD.

93. *Ibid.*, 593CD.

94. *De Vita in Christo*, IV, 596D-97B; cf. John 6,51.

95. *Ibid.*, 597 B.

96. *Ibid.*, 597C.

97. *Ibid.*, 600CDf.

98. *De Vita in Christo*, IV, 600A.

ceive movement from the Head, God, and we are submitted to Him; as children, we obey Him freely.⁹⁹ «...ὡσπερ τὰ μέλη ὡς ὑπὸ κεφαλῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ κινηθῆναι... τοῦ λόγου τὴν αὐτονομίαν σώζοντες ὡσπερ οἱ παῖδες.» Then our author shows that this supernatural adoption established between Christ and us constitutes an eternal and infinite relationship, much more intimate than that between parents and children: «In the natural generation the actual blood of the children is not the same with that of their parents... On the contrary, the blood and flesh of Christ, that we assume by Holy Communion, are actually identical and always the same.¹⁰⁰ The communion with the flesh and blood of our parents took place once: at birth. But we always communicate with Christ's Body, Blood, and Members: «Τῷ Χριστῷ δὲ ὡς ἀληθῶς κοινωνοῦμεν, πρὸς ὃν καὶ αἰεὶ σῶμα καὶ αἷμα καὶ μέλη καὶ πάντα κοινά.»¹⁰¹ Christ, the Head, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit. Christ and the Holy Spirit, therefore, can regenerate us, the Members. This theological development of the idea of Members, Head and Heart comes to a conclusion in Cabasilas's assertion that «Christendom», Χριστιανισμός, means Incorporation in Christ's Body and Life. This is possible especially by Holy Communion.¹⁰² The Eucharist, therefore, is the center of our supernatural life, and the Eucharistic Christ is the Heart of this life. Christ, moreover, is not only the cause and the beginning of life, like parents; He is Life Itself. «He who is united with Christ feels Him much more personally than his or her own ontological being... since we became His members and children and communicated with His Flesh, Blood, and Spirit..., and He is much more near to us than our own parents...»¹⁰³

Cabasilas opens again his thought to us when in another beautiful passage he speaks in the same terms about the royalty of our Saviour: «Through His sufferings and passion, Christ established His pure and real royalty, where He introduced all His followers, because He is more than a friend, more just than a sovereign, more affectionate than a father, more intimate than the members, more indispensable than the heart, καρδίας ἀναγκαιότερον.¹⁰⁴

R o y a l t y a n d I n t i m a c y : the insistence of Cabasilas on these two words is remarkable. He associates these two words with

99. Ibid., 600A.

100. Ibid., 600CD.

101. Ibid., 601A.

102. Ibid., 604AB.

103. De Vita in Christo, IV, 613C, 616C.

104. Ibid., 620BC.

the person of our Lord, and all the images and expressions he uses are always inspired by the mystical spirit of those two words. Such expressions as already mentioned are: king, friend, father, members, head, and heart. Of special importance also are his three expressions: *σύσσωμοι*, *συμμέτοχοι*,¹⁰⁵ and *συνουσία*.¹⁰⁶ Another important passage concerning the Eucharistic realism and the ultimate consequences of this doctrine of the Mystical Body is the following: «...He is Master not only of bodies, but also of souls and wills; He exercises an independent and pure royalty; He rules by Himself, likewise the soul rules the body and the head controls the Members...»¹⁰⁷ We note here the role of Christ as the Soul of the Mystical Body: a very neighbouring analogy with that of Heart. An ultimate result of this intimate union and Incorporation with Christ is immortality: «...ούτω, τὰ Χριστοῦ μέλη, θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· πῶς γὰρ ἂν γεύσαιτο θανάτου τῆς ζωῆς αἰὲ καρδίας ἐξηρατώμενα;»¹⁰⁸ Cabasilas, in order to emphasize this immortality insists always that even the bones of Saints are Incorporated with the Mystical Body. On the day of the final manifestation of Christ, these bones will take the proper brightness as Members of the glorious Christ.¹⁰⁹ «ἡ θαυμαστὴ ἐκεῖνη ψυχὴ... πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἐχώρησε, καὶ τῇ πάντων κεφαλῇ τῷ Χριστῷ συνήφθη, θαυμαστὸν μέλος καὶ πρόπον προπούση κεφαλῆ.»

Very important is Cabasilas' conception of the resurrection of our bodies in connection with his doctrine of the Mystical Body, based on the Scriptural comparison of the final manifestation of the Son of Man with that of spreading East to West (Matth. 24, 27). Then Cabasilas proceeds to associate the two images, the Members of the Mystical Body and the light, considering the bodies of Saints as the members of this light, since the just will be at that day glorified and perfectly participating in the splendid glory and brightness of Christ.¹¹⁰ «The just bring constantly with them this brightness with which they arrive to the eternal life... That which will happen to each one at that time of resurrection, namely to refind the integrity of their body by the reunion of bones, parts and members with the head, the same will happen to Christ the Saviour, the common Head of the Great Body. This di-

105. Ibid., 600-21; cf. Eph. 3, 6.

106. Div. Lit. Int. Ch. 44, 464AB; Ch. 53, 489B; Comp. (De Vita in Christo, VII, 696P.G.

107. De Vita in Christo, V, 621AB.

108. Ibid., 621D.

109. Panegyricos on St. Demetrios, ed. Th. Ioaninou, M.W., pp. 101-102, n'. 33.

110. De Vita in Christo, IV, 624A.

vine Head will appear in full brightness in the heavens, and will collect from all the parts His scattered Members: God among gods, good leader of a good chorus, Θεὸς ἐν μέσῳ θεῶν, ὠραῖος ὠραίου κορυφαῖος χ ο ρ ο ὦ...»¹¹¹

The same idea is expressed in the following passages referring to the necessity and effects of the Eucharist: «The Eucharistic supper leads to the glorious Body of Christ: without the first, it is impossible to attain the second, like a man deprived of his eyes is not able to get the experience of light. In fact, those who do not participate in this supper, do not have life in themselves. How could an immortal head be the head of mortal members?» ...μελῶν νεκρῶν πῶς ἀθάνατος ἂν γένοιτο κεφαλῆ;¹¹² The virtue of the sacred Table is unique and the inviter is the same in the two heavens, in this life as well as in eternity: There the bridal hall; here, the way to this bridal hall, above all to the Bridegroom Himself... And this is the reason that «the kingdom of God is within us.»¹¹³

By this passage our theologian emphasizes the continuity of grace in the glory through «the life in Christ». A basis of his augmentation is always the analogy of the Mystical Body: Members, Head, Heart. This analogy is also clearly developed in a chapter of his DIVINAE LITURGIAE INTERPRETATIO, where he answers the question concerning the manner in which the Holy Mysteries signify the Church. He writes that «the Church is not symbolically represented in them but really and intimately, as the limbs are represented in the heart and the branches in the root, and as our Lord has said: «as the shoots in the vine.»¹¹⁴ The Church, moreover, is the very Body of the Lord, τὸ κυριακὸν σῶμα.¹¹⁵

Cabasilas also succeeds in his attempt to associate this spiritual view of the Church with the practical view of Christian life and perfection of her members. This point is largely discussed in the last two books of his DE VITA IN CHRISTO.

We shall try to present his basic thought. Love and joy in Christ constitute the true happiness and the spiritual perfection of this life.¹¹⁶

111. Ibid., 624B.

112. Ibid., 625B.

113. Panegyricos..., Th. Ioannou, M.W., p. 79, no. 14; De Vita in Christo, IV, 625B; cf. Luke 17,21.

114. Div. Lit. Int., ch. 38, col. 452CD.

115. Ibid., 463A.

116. Vita in Christo, VII, 724C.

The Christian perfection lies not in the possession of «charismata», but in the will that is full of the love, experience, *πεῖρα*, *philtron*, *pathos*, and *eros* of God.¹¹⁷ This love is a virtue of the will primarily. It is absolutely necessary to identify, first, our will with the will of God by the practice of His Commandments and to conform our *gnome* with Christ's *gnome* — to submit all our desires and thoughts to His own will and plans.¹¹⁸ Cabasilas always emphasizes the priority of the will, the *ἡγεμονικὸν πνεῦμα*,¹¹⁹ and then of the love and longing, *pothos*, in our spiritual perfection and the contemplation of God and His Kingdom. «Τὸ συνεῖναι Χριστῷ τρυφή ἐστι τῆς θελήσεως. Διὰ τοῦτο τοῖς θελήσασι καὶ ἡγαπηκόσι καὶ ποθήσασιν ἕξεστι μόνους.»¹²⁰ Since man has a free will, his spiritual perfection is *ἔθειλόςιος* (fruit of the free will).¹²¹ For this reason, the main purpose of the Incarnation of Christ was to redeem and sanctify the human will, not by violation, but through the absolute obedience and submission of His human will to the divine will.¹²²

But what is the criterion to be sure that our will and soul communicate with God? *Philtron*, Joy and Sorrow — when our soul feels sorrow for those things that it should be sorrowful for, and when it rejoices and feels happy for the happiness and progress of others. Because in this way it really imitates God Himself, His unselfish love and goodness, and because it also proves that it loves good, not for its own benefit, but because of its own divine splendour and pleasure.¹²³

In Cabasilas' writings and thought, these three words: love, joy and pleasure, *φιλτρον* - *χαρὰ* - *ἡδονή*, are always placed side by side, in a «symmetrical» relationship. The love-*philtron* to God forms the ultimate and pure pleasure, «τὴν τελειωτάτην καὶ καθαρὰν ἡδονήν»,¹²⁴ since, 1) this love is foreign to personal advantages and to any worldly interests or misfortune;¹²⁵ 2) the object of this love excludes any kind of egocentrism or self-admiration;¹²⁶ 3) this object itself is the ultimate

117. De Vita in Christo, VII, 720-21Af., 724Df, 721B-Df.

118. Ibid., VII, 688Df, 721CDf, 724-C; comp. Ibid., VI, 644ABf.

119. Ibid., VI, 684CD.

120. Ibid., II, 541D, 544ABf.

121. Ibid., VII, 689AB.

122. Ibid., VII, 716BCf.

123. De Vita in Christo, VII, 702BCf.

124. Ibid., 705 C.

125. Ibid., 712-13AB.

126. Ibid., 705CD.

Good and Happiness;¹²⁷ 4) this love itself is the best expression of the ultimate gratitude, justice, and wisdom towards God's infinite love for the fallen man, consequently its enjoyment is also infinite and incomparable: «τῇ τῆς ἀγάπης ὑπερβολῇ παντάπασι ἐφάμιλλος ἡ χαρά;»¹²⁸ 5) this pleasure is not subject to any anxiety or suspicion since its virtue and origin and source is Christ Himself: ὑπερφυᾶ καὶ θεία ἡδονή.¹²⁹ It is, therefore, the perfect pleasure, ἡ ὁλόκληρος ἡδονή, and the fulfillment of all happiness, ὁλόκληρον τὴν δύναμιν τῆς χαρᾶς, since its cause (Christ) surpasses all graces: πᾶσαν ὑπερβαίνει χαρίτων ὑπερβολήν.¹³⁰ But this «symmetrical» relationship between the expressions of Cabasilas: Eros-, Philtron, joy and pleasure is basically conditioned by the intensity of the will.¹³¹ It is also the fruit of our consciousness, *epignosis*, and experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit.¹³² Moreover, this divine Eros-Philtron, which is generally known as Agape, corresponds to a certain natural relationship, συγγένεια,¹³³ or intimate experience, πεῖρα, of God Himself. Without this «natural relationship» or identification of our ego with our Saviour's own Ego, it is impossible to long for πόθος, and desire, ἐπιθυμία, Him. On the contrary, with this «natural relationship» we are divinized, θέωσις, and we live in a divine ecstasy, μέθη, τῆς φύσεως ἐκστῆναι.¹³⁴

This is clearly shown in the death of Martyrs. Since they were entirely united with their Philtron and Bridegroom, they did not fear any kind of martyrdom or torment.¹³⁵ This Agape and Eros, two aspects of the divine love in Nicolas Cabasilas as well as in Gregory of Nyssa,¹³⁶ is stronger and more prominent than the earthly life, since its source is the divine — Christ Himself — the true and eternal life,¹³⁷ the repose of all human love, τὸ κατάλυμα τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐρώτων.¹³⁸ «What comparison with this Agape-philtron is there? Who among the holiest men

127. Ibid., II, 561BC.

128. Ibid., VII, 705CDf; comp. Ibid., II, 561CD.

129. De Vita in Christo, VII, 713CD.

130. Ibid., 716-17AB.

131. Ibid., 689BC.

132. Ibid., II, 561CD, 565Df.

133. Ibid., VII, 712AB.

134. Ibid., II, 552-553ABf.

135. Ibid.; comp. 553CDf.

136. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et theologie Mystique*, pp. 300-325.

137. De Vita in Christo, VII, 724Cqf.

138. Ibid., VI, 681BC.

could be inspired by so intense an *eros* that he would still love his love's object, even while suffering and continually being persecuted by it?¹³⁹ Which supernatural force and divine mysticism can be representative in the above passage — it is difficult to determine. Certainly, the expression, *maniacal eros*, *μανιακός έρωας*, derives from Plato, but it is Cabasilas that introduces this expression to the Christian vocabulary in regard to the love of God, and in this point he is original.¹⁴⁰ The expressions: *Eros*, *Philtron*, *Pathos*, are used by the Greek Fathers only on occasion. Only W. Gass¹⁴¹ specifies that these «erotic» terms are of ancient origin. But, according to Borodine,¹⁴² only Theodoretus of Cyrus among the Fathers adopted truly the term *Philtron*, and this in its intimate connection with the flashing love of Martyrs.¹⁴³ The *Philtron* always designates in this writer of the 4th century, the *Paroxysmos* of love. *Philtron* also replaces *agape* in Gregory of Nyssa,¹⁴⁴ J. Daniélou showed that the names: *Agape*, *Eros*, and *Philtron* were synonymous during the times of Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁴⁵ But Nicolas Cabasilas enriches more this vocabulary by the expressions: *pathos*,¹⁴⁶ and *epithymia*.¹⁴⁷ *Pathos* in Cabasilas' Christocentric mysticism represents a particular aspect of *Agape*. The divine *Eros* is the «good pathos», τὸ καλὸν τοῦτο πάθος,¹⁴⁸ and as such *Eros* is an aspect also of the divine *Agape*, its most intensive form and fervour.¹⁴⁹

139. *Ibid.*, VI, 648AB.

140. *Ibid.*, VII, 709BC; II, 560CD; I, 517AB: σφόδρα μαινεται περὶ τὸν στρατιώτην (Χρ.). VI, 672D, 677AB; VII, 700Df, 720AB: θεῖος έρωας; VI, 677BC, 680Af; VII, 693Df: έρωας Χριστοῦ κ' ἀρετῆς; VII, 701BC: θεῖων έρώτων; *Panegyricos...* Th. Ioannou, *Op. Cit.*, p. 86; τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ έρώτων; VII, 724Df.: ὁ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀπόρητος έρωας καὶ ἡ ἐπ' αὐτῷ χαρά; *Ibid.*, I, 516Df, 544 BC, 517CD; II, 560CD, VII, 693D: "Αρρητον φίλτρον (referring to man's love for Christ); VI, 669BC, 669Df, 672BC (referring to Christ's love to men); VII, 701BC: τοῦ Θεοῦ φίλτρον; VII, 725 ABf: τὸ καλὸν τοῦτο πάθος (referring to the divine eros) that regenerates, nourishes, and vivifies the «ineffable nativity», τὴν ἀνεκλάλητον γέννησιν, of the soul, comp. *Ibid.*, VII, 712-13AB: τὸ πάθος ἄτοπον κ' ὑπερφυές; *Ibid.*, 721A.

141. W. Cass, *Op. Cit.*, p. 206.

142. M. Lot-Borodine, *Op. Cit.*, p. 144.

143. Theodoretus, *Op. Cit.*, ed. Schutze, v.l., p. 1559, v. 88, p. 59.

144. See J. Daniélou, *Op. Cit.*, p. 213.

145. *Ibid.*

146. *De Vita in Christo*, VII, 712-13AB, 725ABf, 721Af.

147. *Ibid.*, 708Bf.

148. *Ibid.*, 725ABf.

149. *Ibid.*, 709BC; II, 560CD.

There is not, therefore, any contradiction or antithesis between the divine Agape—Eros, even if this thought does not seem completely acceptable to the modern mind.¹⁵⁰

We would sum up this parenthesis on the Cabasilian doctrine of *Agape - Eros - Philtron - Pathos - Epithymia - Pothos* as follows: the soul having reached spiritual maturity by continually keeping the Commandments of God participates in the divine life and beauty.¹⁵¹ In this state it becomes full of the divine Eros and Philtron; it is attracted by the love and beauty of its Bridegroom, Christ, and is held by a fervid and sacred passion, desire and longing for the union with Him. As a result of this intimate and intense eros — derived from the fulfillment of the Commandments — its divinization, *θέωσις*, the «blessed life», *ἡ μακαρία ζωή*, becomes a reality.¹⁵² As in all the Greek Fathers, so in Cabasilas also, the *theosis* of man does not mean a change of the human nature into the divine «substance», *Οὐσία*, but sharing in God's love, peace, glory, and enjoyment in His presence and manifestations, *ἐνέργειαι*.¹⁵³

Let us return to the basic Cabasilian conception of Christ as the Head and Heart of the Mystical Body. «He who is to live in Christ», Cabasilas writes, «should be dependent on His Heart and His Head, since life itself is impossible without them, and this cannot be grasped, being not of the same mind of Christ, of the same *gnome*, and will... since it is against reason to have only one heart, and at the same time many controversial desires, he who is not of the same mind as Christ ...and does not live according to the desire of his heart is proved as being dependent on another heart...»¹⁵⁴ Obviously, Cabasilas' main emphasis is on Christ as the living Heart of the Mystical Body.

Of special importance and deep theological mysticism is the development of Christ's love for man and man's love and devotion to Christ.¹⁵⁵ The continual meditation of our Saviour's love and *philanthropy* leads our thought to His real presence and to our spiritual perfection.¹⁵⁶ This idea causes Cabasilas' enthusiastic affirmation of the «wonderful mystery»... We are temple of the living God.» These mem-

150. See A. Nygren, *AGAPE AND EROS*, London, 1954.

151. *De Vita in Christo*, VII, 721Af.

152. *Ibid.*, 721CD, 712AB.

153. *Ibid.*, 712A-Cf; comp. *Ibid.*, 724BC, 708-9Af, 705CDf.

154. *De Vita in Christo*, VI, 644ABf.

155. *Ibid.*, 645Df.

156. *Ibid.*, 644CD, 648CD, 676BC, 652ABf; comp. VII, 693CD.

bers (of our body) are the Members of Christ; Cherubim adore the Head (Christ) of these Members; these feet; these hands are dependent on that Heart (Christ)»; «...ὕπὲρ οὗ νεῶς ἐσμὲν Θεοῦ ζῶντος. Χριστοῦ μέλη ταῦτα τὰ μέλη, τούτων τῶν μελῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν τὰ Χερουβίμ προσκυνεῖ, οἱ πόδες οὗτοι, αἱ χεῖρες αὐταὶ ἐκείνης ἐξήρτηνται τῆς καρδίας.»¹⁵⁷ A practical consequence of that affirmation is our duty to keep our members pure, since they are Christ's Members; «like a vessel, they contain the blood of Christ...»¹⁵⁸ And, therefore, «Nothing is so sacred as man, with whose nature God Himself was united.»¹⁵⁹ The principal task of man is, consequently, to know as well as to realize his destiny and the philanthropy of God.¹⁶⁰

Cabasilas' thought, far from that of Socrates, combines successfully idealism and Christian personalism: know the destiny of human nature in order to build upon this knowledge all your life.¹⁶¹

And then the Cabasilian thought grasps its final spectacle in facing the glorious royalty of God, when the resurrected just will assemble in cheerfulness around the triumphant God-Man. «Incomparable solemnity, all as a people, all as gods around the One God; good creatures around the Good «par excellence»; servants around the Master...»: «...δῆμον θεῶν περὶ τὸν Θεόν, καλοὺς περὶ τὸν ὄραϊον, οἰκέτας περὶ τὸν δεσπότην...»¹⁶²

Should we be astonished if this meditation is succeeded by a true song of love to Christ? Love demands love! This Love is not reciprocated sufficiently by man;¹⁶³ this Saviour, Who is according to all truth our *alter ego*: «... τοῦτο πρὸς ἀλήθειαν αὐτὸς ἐκάστῳ γένηται τῶν προσκειμένων, ἄλλος αὐτός»,¹⁶⁴ and Who to those who seek Him sincerely, «is nearer than they are to their own heart: «...ὅς γε τοῖς ζητοῦσι καὶ αὐτῆς ἔγγιόν ἐστι τῆς καρδίας.»¹⁶⁵

Apparently, it is the basic idea of Christ as the Heart of the Mystical Body that inspires Cabasilas here. Certainly, this idea is not

157. Ibid., 648Bf.

158. Ibid., 648D, 649 A.

159. De Vita in Christo, VI, 649Bf.

160. Ibid., 652A, 680AB.

161. Ibid., 664C, 665D, 668A.

162. Ibid., 649C.

163. Ibid., 664C.

164. Ibid., 665A.

165. De Vita in Christo, VI, 681B; cf. Panegyricos..., Th. Ioannou, Op. Cit., p. 76, no. 12; 78; no. 14; 81, no. 17; 86, no. 21; 89, no. 23; 100, no. 32.

directly biblical, but it naturally springs from that of body, head, and members. The heart is the center of all vital forces and the most intimate principle of all movements and activities. Our theologian, however, does not distinguish scholastically between the activities of mind and heart, or their analogies and faculties. Let us recall one of his principal passages in the *DE VITA IN CHRISTO*: «The union of God with those who love Him overpasses any other union that is possible to imagine and it is not subject to any comparison... not even with the nuptial union...»¹⁶⁶

In his Christocentric mysticism, Nicolas Cabasilas is basically influenced by St. Ignatius of Antioch and Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius and Simeon the New Theologian.¹⁶⁷

166. *Ibid.*, I, 497BC.

167. G. Bardy, *La vie spirituelle d'après les pères des trois premiers siècles*, Paris, 1935, pp. 242-254.

D. CONCLUSION

Arriving at the end of our study, let us try to answer two fundamental questions:

1. What was the contribution of Nicolas Cabasilas to the theology of his epoch and in what lies the originality of his work?

2. What did he receive from his epoch and predecessors?

Cabasilas, undoubtedly, is one of the primary representatives of the Byzantine theological renovation. He was not a mere imitator but a distinctive personality. The analysis of his principal writings proves that Simeon (the New Theologian), Gregory Palamas, and Nicolas Cabasilas constitute an inseparable trinity. They are the «landmark» of a very important period of Church history and theology; the «leading» personalities of the Byzantine period — the period not of the Christological problems but of the «theology» of Pneumatology.

During this period the early «theology» was completed by the «doctrine of the eternal and spiritual life.» This spirituality was transferred from the monasteries and deserts to the cities and became a common property of all people. Furthermore, the purpose of this transfer was to «Christize» and «spiritualize» the whole human being, every activity and manifestation of man, not only his religious life but also the world of his daily affairs and tasks, his objective behavior and relations and the depths of his own inner world.

These three Fathers dominate this cosmogonic period. The first sowed, the other two reaped. Beginning in the eleventh century, Simeon laid down the core of theological thought and life concerning the issues of God's grace and the divinizing «activity» of the Holy Spirit. Thus, he had inaugurated the «new theology», namely, pneumatology or spirituality. However, in the fourteenth century, St. Gregory Palamas proved that this «new theology» is not an arbitrary modernism but a logical consequence and extension, the normal fruit of the «old theology», its integration, without which its («old») very existence is impossible.

Finally, Nicolas Cabasilas (a layman, lawyer, and statesman)¹⁶⁸ is the *par excellence* doctor of Pneumatology, or spirituality. He is the man who, by his incomparable eloquence, clarity and personal experience, showed that theology, spirituality, and Sacramental Life are essentially identical; that every Christian independently from his social position or profession can and must participate in the Liturgical and Sacramental Life of the Church, can live «theologically» and be a temple of the Holy Spirit, «Christos», and can actually be the Temple and House of Christ Himself.

It is, therefore, obvious that in order to understand and properly evaluate the theological contribution and work of each of these Fathers, it is necessary to consider Cabasilas' thought in connection and in parallelism with the other two. Unfortunately, we could not do that in our present study because of the required limitations of space especially. Therefore, we ask for lenient criticism.

In her conclusion, M. Lot-Borodine,¹⁶⁹ finds that Cabasilas had borrowed in a limited quantity expressions and ideas from Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. He was inspired mostly by Simeon the New Theologian, in his Christocentrism and intensity of love, or Eros for God.¹⁷⁰ In a limited extent, this is correct. It is noteworthy, however, that the Cabasilian teaching about love for Christ does not include the variety of Simeon's erotic expressions; it is milder and more simple.

Moreover, the basic characteristic of the mystical regeneration in Cabasilas is not the rational predominance of the Alexandrians, nor the asceticism of hermits, nor the *ecstasis* of Dionysius, nor the erotic enjoyment of Simeon, nor the contemplation of the hesychasts; it is the Sacramental Christocentrism. We can, therefore, place him next to the Apostle Paul. Nicolas Cabasilas is one of the «leading» representatives of Orthodox Mystical Theology. He attempted, like Origen, to compose a system of approaching God, which is possible not only for monks but also for those who live in the world. He is not a solitary *anchorite*. His mystical spirit is socially oriented. The law of the spirit, which is the love of God, is a law of friendship to Him.

168. J. F. Boissonade, *Anecdota nova*, 1844, p. 313; cf. E. Fegrand, *Lettres de l'empereur Manuel II Paléologue...*, 1893, p. 8, 90 (no. 6).

169. M. Lot-Borodine, *Op. Cit.*, p. 175ff.

170. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

In order to follow this law, it is not necessary to be subject to hardships and austerities.¹⁷¹

The destiny of man is based on and accomplished by the co-operation of human will with the divine grace and particularly by the *mimesis Christi and Philtron - Eros*, the necessary presupposition and inspiration of *mimesis*. This teaching of Cabasilas is surrounded by an atmosphere of confidence. It is entirely foreign to the anxiety of Pascal and mainly of Kierkegaard, and to the pessimism of St. Augustine. There is no neurosis, neither doubt nor anguish. The *mysterium tremendum* is connected with the charm of the *mysterium fascinatum*.

For Cabasilas, the human will is truly free when it takes its flash and light from the Sacraments and all its actions express the revealed truth.

Cabasilas strives to preserve the Christian thought in the analysis of the Liturgical Symbolism, and to show its importance and necessity as a way to the real union with Jesus. Thus, in him both directions of the tradition of the Byzantine Spirituality are met and completed: the symbolical and the practical idealism.

Although a strict supporter of the necessity of *mysterium* in the life of a Christian, Cabasilas is not an enemy of science like Stegathatos. In addition, our author does not hesitate to consider the angels as «incomplete» beings, since they had not received in this world a complete humanity in order to be morally tested. Every being that is able only by virtue to be spiritually perfect is incomplete and imperfect.¹⁷² This was a daring theory, but such intellectual liberalism was usual at the Byzantium of his times. So from this criticism of asceticism, the conciliation of religious mysticism with the wisdom of the practising Christian life in the world becomes apparent.

Cabasilas' point concerning departure is identical with that of Simeon, the New Theologian. He, too, believes that the Spirit of God is still living in the Church as in the Apostolic Age. All his work aims, on the one hand, to persuade us that this living Spirit really exists today, and, on the other hand, to show what kind of life is our «Life in Christ» and how we can preserve it. In this latter point, his model is Dionysius the Areopagete.

171. Cabasilas, *De vita in Christo*, VI, 657D-660A.: VI, 681BC.

172. Letter of Cabasilas to Synadenos; cf. Tafrafi O., *Thessalonique Au XIXe siècle*, pp. 153-154, n. 4.

In order to be acquainted with Christ we must, first, suffer all that He had suffered, be tested by all that He had been tested with, and become that which He became. But how? The Sacraments, offer precisely, the opportunity to live the life of Jesus and to strengthen the ties of such an acquaintance with Him.¹⁷³

But Cabasilas is not a mystic in the strict sense of the word; he is nowhere occupied by mystical stages and ecstasies. In his *DE VITA IN CHRISTO*, he does not try anything other than to describe the life of grace of the ordinary Christian. And Nicolas achieves this by an inspired theology and an imposing conception of the divine plan concerning the super-natural destiny or *telos* of man and of the role of the Redeemer Christ and the continuity of grace.¹⁷⁴

«Life in Christ» is the life of Christ, which is opened to us by a mystery of intimate connection. Of this Cabasilas asks: «how can a thing be better acquainted than with itself?» Thus, the union with Christ is much more powerful, and the blessed spirits feel this acquaintance and union with the Saviour much more strongly than that with their own nature.¹⁷⁵ Jesus is through the eyes of faith our Host and our Home, *ἐνοικος καὶ οἰκία*.¹⁷⁶ We breathe Jesus, *ὡς μύρον καὶ εὐωδία*, Who makes us His Body and becomes for us what the head is for members.¹⁷⁷

Cabasilas is fascinated by the thought of this reality and develops the great doctrine of the *CORPUS MYSTICUM*, the Incorporation of all believers in Christ.¹⁷⁸ In this point lies the difference between the New and the Old Testament; It is, precisely, the presence of Christ Who, presenting Himself to our souls, prepares them to be fashioned by Him in an ineffable manner.¹⁷⁹

In this point also lies an originality of Cabasilas which can be compared with the parallel doctrine of Origen concerning the *Corpus Mysticum*. Certainly, Origen knew of the conception of *Corpus Mysticum* as a supernatural organism, within which the divine life and the expression itself of «the hidden and fructifying life in Christ»¹⁸⁰ circulates.

173. Cabasilas, *De Vita in Christo*, II, 524AB.

174. Cabasilas, *De Vita in Christo*, I, 493B.

175. *Ibid.*, 500A; comp. *Ibid.*, IV, 601AB; 612DF, 613Cf.

176. *Ibid.*, IV, 584C.

177. *Ibid.*, I, 520A; II, 548B-D; IV, 625B.

178. *Ibid.*, I, 501BCf.

179. *Ibid.*, II, 553Bf.

180. See G. Bardy, *La vie spirituelle d'après les pères des trois premiers siècles* (Paris, 1935).

The Cabasilian conception of the *mimesis Christi* appears, however, for the first time. Its substantial image, and above all, of the «Blessed Heart», *Makaria Kardea*,¹⁸¹ is unrivaled and really original. The Christocentric mysticism of Origen is a mysticism which is not reduced as we know it today to the cult of the Logos alone.¹⁸² The emphasis or the expressions in these two writers are not the same, except those which refer to martyrdom. Origen, compromise-ly heroic, looks for the struggle and suffering; Cabasilas searches above all for the revelation of *Philtron*, the intensive love and union with the *Makaria Kardea*. The reason for their difference should be ascribed to the different conception of the consubstantiality *omo-ousia*, of the Son with the Father: «the Lord Jesus» of Origen was not yet so much consubstantial with the Father. Therefore, as an Alexandrian, he could not entirely base on the Son the whole adoration due to the Father; this had been accomplished by the Byzantine mystagogue who never separated the Son, even in His humanity itself, from the heavenly Father. This is the sacred moment absent in Origen, but so intensively felt and experienced by the author of the *DIVINAE LITURGIAE INTERPRETATIO*.¹⁸³

181. Cabasilas, *De Vita in Christo*, IV, 596Df.; comp. *Ibid.*, 617Cf.

182. See W. Volker, *Das vollommenheitsideal des origenes*, Tübingen, 1931, and F. Bortrand, *Mystique de Jesus Chez origene* (Paris, 1951).

183. M. Lot-Borodine, *Op. Cit.*, p. 177.