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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Présentation	9
------------------------	---

EXPOSÉS INTRODUCTIFS

Thomas POTT, La liturgie en otage. Les « liaisons dangereuses » entre théologie et rituel	13
Christophe D'ALOISIO, Liturgie et orthodoxie	23
Bruno BÜRKI, La doctrine protestante au titre d'appel à la liturgie	33

LA LITURGIE, ÉVÈNEMENT MANIFESTANT UNE DOCTRINE

Maksim KIVELEV, Liturgy and Doctrine in the Context of Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Second Part of XIX th century	41
Klara N. KOBELYUKH, Nicholas Cabasilas: The Sacramental Experience of the Faithful and Hesychasm	49
Victoria LEBZYAK, Alexander Schmemmann on the Principles of Liturgical Reform	67
André LOSSKY, Le thème de la lumière dans les Vêpres byzantines	79

TEXTES ET RITES LITURGIQUES ET LEUR ENJEU DOCTRINAL

Claude TASSIN, Traditions apotropaïques liées au Psaume 91 (90) : anges et démons	89
Andrew WADE, <i>L'Horologion</i> du Sinaï Arabe 232 (13 ^{ème} s.), témoin d'une fusion pluriculturelle	111

Mirko D'ANGELO, La prière <i>Nemo dignus</i> entre Alexandrie et Antioche : comparaison entre diverses rédactions et leurs implications théologiques	125
Daniel OLTEAN, Une pratique liturgique en désaccord avec la pensée théologique byzantine : le rituel du petit habit monastique	141
Jolly VASUPURATHUKARAN PAVUNNY, <i>The Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium</i> 1991 as a Case Study of the Creative Exchange between Liturgical Traditions and Theological Developments	155
Constantin POGOR, Analyse théologico-philologique de l'énumération « un peuple élu (spécial), un sacerdoce royal, une nation sainte » de l'anaphore de la Liturgie de Saint Basile	175

LA LITURGIE COMME DÉPÔT DOCTRINAL
LE MYSTÈRE PASCAL ET AUTRES FÊTES

Charles RENOUX, Pâques : Résurrection, Ascension et apparitions dans la plus ancienne hymnographie de Jérusalem .	197
Michel SIMION, La liturgie, théologie en acte : l'Octave de Pâques, selon André Scrima	207
Goran ILIC BENKE, Le Dimanche de tous les Saints dans la tradition liturgique pascale de l'Église orthodoxe	219
Françoise JEANLIN, La fête de la Nativité de la Mère de Dieu. Harmonie générale de la liturgie et de la doctrine . .	231
Joost VAN ROSSUM, La Dormition de la Mère de Dieu dans la tradition orthodoxe : origine, liturgie et doctrine de la fête.	249
Johan TE VELDE, Light upon the Soul, Mystical Aspects of the Feast of Epiphany	271
Cezar LOGIN, L'influence de la piété sur les structures liturgiques : l'exemple de la période préparatoire à Noël dans la pratique roumaine contemporaine	289

LA LITURGIE CONFRONTÉE À D'AUTRES INSTITUTIONS

Cyrille VAEL, La « liturgisation » de la cérémonie de la Cour sous le règne de Louis XIV. Quelques réflexions sur le « théâtral »	297
Joris GELDHOF, Liturgie et sécularisme : l'histoire d'une lutte inutile	307
Maryana HNYP, Liturgy and Fundamentalism : the Challenge of the Incarnation and Liturgical Integrity	319

ÉVOLUTIONS ET RÉSISTANCES

Przemysław NOWAKOWSKI, Latinisation ou inculturation de la liturgie byzantine après l'Union de Brest. La polémique autour de la question des rites au XVII ^e siècle	331
Simon MARINCAK, Byzantine Liturgical Legislation in the Old Hungarian Kingdom in the 16 th - 18 th Centuries ...	351
Gilles DROUIN, Liturgie et doctrine en tension, l'exemple de l'articulation nef-chœur dans les édifices catholiques en France après le concile de Trente	363

LA LITURGIE FACE À LA DOCTRINE

Marcel METZGER, Contamination de la liturgie latine par la doctrine et relance de la réforme conciliaire	373
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<i>Auteurs et organisateurs</i>	405
<i>Index thématique</i>	411

NICHOLAS CABASILAS¹ :
THE SACRAMENTAL EXPERIENCE
OF THE FAITHFUL AND HESYCHASM

My paper will analyze two works of Cabasilas – *The Life in Christ* and *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* – focusing on the non-polemical style of Cabasilas and on how, in these works, theological doctrine and the liturgical practice of the faithful stand in perfect harmony. I will emphasize the meaning of spiritual experience for both Palamas and Cabasilas, and in particular how Cabasilas’ understanding of the sacramental experience of the Church can rightly be considered an expanded explanation of Palamas’ concept of spiritual experience.²

1. NICHOLAS CABASILAS : PERSONAL SPIRITUAL HARMONY
AS REFLECTING HIS HARMONY OF THINKING

In order not to repeat existing biographies of Nicholas Cabasilas,³ in this first section I would like to simply highlight some important details about his life.

¹ In English it’s name is often written also « Kabasilas ».

² See also: B. BOBRINSKOY, « Nicolas Cabasilas et la spiritualité hésychaste », in *La pensée orthodoxe. Travaux de l’Institut de théologie orthodoxe Saint Serge à Paris*, XII. Série française I (1966), 21–42.

³ The chronology of Nicholas Cabasilas’ life is already well presented in following articles: V. LAURENT, « Un nouveau témoin de la correspondance de Démétrius Cydonès et de l’activité littéraire de Nicolas Cabasilas Chamaétos », *Ἑλληνικά* 9 (1936), 185–205; R.-J. LOENERTZ, « Chronologie de Nicolas Cabasilas 1345–1354 », *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 21 (1955), 205–231; S. A. A. SALAVILLE, « Quelques précisions pour la biographie de Nicolas Cabasilas », in *Actes du IX^e Congrès International d’Études Byzantines à Thessalonique*, vol. 3, Athènes 1958, 215–226; M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, « Introduction », in NICOLAS CABASILAS, *La vie en Christ (= La Vie) I–V*, ed. et tr. M.-H. Congourdeau (*Sources Chrétiennes* 355), Cerf, Paris 1989, 11–27; M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, « Nicola Cabasilas e il suo tempo », in *Nicola Cabasilas e la divina liturgia: atti del XIV Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa, sezione bizantina, Bose, 14–16 settembre 2006*, edd. S. Chialà – L. Cremaschi, Qiqajon, Magnano (BI) 2007, 25–45.

a) *The dates of his birth and death are approximate :*

It is presumed that he was born to a noble family, between 1319 and 1323, in Thessaloniki. At the time of Nicholas Cabasilas' birth, Byzantium had already lost a significant part of its territory, which continued to be steadily conquered by expanding Ottomans, Serbs and Bulgarians. Moreover, the Byzantine State was weakened and shattered by intrigues and domestic fights between the members of Imperial family itself. It's generally believed that he died after 1391,⁴ when he was mentioned for the last time in a letter of Manuel II Paleologus.⁵

b) *Nicholas, a remarkable scholar, a politically active and a deeply spiritual lay man :*

He begins his studies in Thessaloniki in 1335 with his uncle Nicholas-Neilos Cabasilas and then continued his education in Constantinople. Besides philosophy and rhetoric, he studied mathematics, astronomy, and law, and dedicated a lot of attention to the study of Holy Scripture and the Church Fathers. He was an educated man, and had extensive knowledge of many subjects while remaining engaged in the social, intellectual and religious life of his time. He had a strong social conscience, criticized the practice of usury, defending the right to property and condemning injustice.⁶ His name indeed can be found listed among intellectual elite of Byzantium of the 14th century.⁷

In 1341 we find him in Thessaloniki during a crucial event of Byzantine history : the conflict between John V Palaiologos (1341–1391), the legitimate emperor, and the usurper of the Byzantine throne,

⁴ Some scholars believe that his death occurred after 1396 since he was also mentioned in a letter of Byzantine theologian Joseph Bryennios (1350–before 1438). But the dating of this letter is uncertain: it is impossible to verify whether it was written in 1390 or in 1396. Accordingly, scholars state that there could be two possible dates of Nicholas' death: around 1391–1392 or 1397–1398. The latter is also the date of death of his dear friend Demetrios Kydones: if Cabasilas was still alive, he would have written about death of his dear friend. For this reason, the first date is more trustworthy: cf. R.-J. LOENERTZ, « Pour la chronologie des œuvres de Joseph Bryennios », *Revue des Études Byzantines* 7 (1949), 16–17; cf. A.-M. TALBOT, « Bryennios, Joseph », in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 330; cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Introduction », in *La Vie, Sch* 355 (1989), 16.

⁵ Cf. *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, ed. G. T. Denis (CFHB.W 8, Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 4), The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington D.C. 1977, XXX–XXXIV, 40–43 (letter 15).

⁶ Cf. A.-M. TALBOT, « Cabasilas, Nicholas Chamaetos », in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, 1088.

⁷ This list was proposed in recent edition: cf. K.-P. MATSCHKE – F. TINNEFELD, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz: Gruppen, Strukturen und Lebensformen*, Böhlau, Köln 2001, 371–385.

John VI Kantacouzenos (1347–1355).⁸ Between 1345 and 1355 Nicholas Cabasilas was a part of Kantakouzenos' entourage, as an advisor and coworker. In 1347 Nicholas spent one year with Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) at Mount Athos.⁹

After 1354, when John VI Kantacouzenos retired from political life, we have little information about Nicholas Cabasilas. We know that he was very dedicated to his theological studies and frequently visited the monastery of the brothers Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopouloi in Constantinople.¹⁰ Recent research confirms, however, that Nicholas Cabasilas remained a lay person till the end of his life.¹¹

From these brief details of his life, we can conclude that Nicholas' keen intellect and his paramount human sensitivity made him an extraordinary person. He reached such interior harmony that he was perfectly capable of withholding himself from the political, social, and

⁸ John VI Kantacouzenos was the most capable politician of his time, working in the court of Andronikos III Palaiologos (1328–1341). In spite of his loyalty to the imperial family, he had to take possession of the Byzantine throne illegally, proclaiming himself emperor in Didymoteicho on October 26, 1341. This was a crucial moment of exterior political danger, since the legitimate emperor, John V Palaiologos, in the moment of death of his father Andronikos III, was only 9 years old. The young Palaiologos was legally represented by his mother Anna of Savoy, *meas doux* Alexios Apokaukos, and the Patriarch of Constantinople, John XIV Kalekas (1334–1347). When rival parties opposed Kantacouzenos, a civil war ensued, lasting six years and ending with the victory of John VI Kantacouzenos, who was proclaimed emperor in Constantinople by Patriarch Isidoros I Boucheiras (1347–1350) in 1347: cf. W. T. READGOLD, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA) 1997, 764–766; cf. G. OSTROGORSKY, *Storia dell'impero bizantino*, Einaudi, Torino 1993², 461–462.

⁹ Cf. M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, « Introduction », in *La Vie*, *SCh* 355 (1989), 13–14. It was believed that Nicholas had been a candidate for the patriarchate in 1353, but thanks to recent studies we know that this was the case for his uncle, Nicholas-Neilos Cabasilas. The latter indeed had become the metropolitan of Thessaloniki from 1361 to 1363: cf. *Ibid.*, 18–20.

¹⁰ From some letters of Cabasilas' epoch we know that around 1377 Cabasilas became a close friend of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425), the son of John V Palaiologos. So, to the trio of friends Cabasilas, Kydones, and Kantacouzenos, there now corresponded the trio of Cabasilas, Kydones, and Manuel II Palaiologos. Regarding Cabasilas' dedication to the Kantacouzenos' family and the aforementioned friendships, see M. JUGIE, « L'éloge de Mathieu Cantacuzène par Nicolas Cabasilas », *Échos d'Orient* 13 (1910), 338–343.

¹¹ Cf. SALAVILLE, « Quelques précisions pour la biographie de Nicolas Cabasilas », 223–224, cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Introduction », in *La Vie*, *SCh* 355 (1989), 17–22; I. Ševčenko and A. Angelopoulos are among those who think that Nicholas Cabasilas had an ecclesiastic title, while S. Salaville, P. Nellas, G. I. Theocharidis, M.-H. Congourdeau, and others believe that he was a lay person; cf. Y. SPITERIS, *Cabasilas, teologo e mistico bizantino: Nicola Cabasilas Chamaetos e la sua sintesi teologica*, Lipa, Roma 1996, 16–18; cf. J. GETCHA, « Nicola Cabasilas e i suoi scritti: un laico che scrive per i laici? », in *Nicola Cabasilas e la divina liturgia*, edd. Chialà – Cremaschi, 51–59.

religious controversies of his time, thus demonstrating how his apparently irreconcilable positions could coexist harmoniously in real life. He himself, deeply Orthodox, wholeheartedly accepted his dear friend Demetrios Kydones' interest in the Latin theology. He was not afraid of being a friend of Kydones while simultaneously remaining a friend of Gregory Palamas ; he supported Palamas and criticized him at the same time ; he was an advisor and friend of Kantacouzenos and yet he wrote a eulogy of Anna of Savoy ; he attended to the monks and still affirmed that spiritual perfection is accessible to every lay person ; he was a Hesychast and a humanist at the same time. Nicholas Cabasilas' personal harmony leads us to conclude that it is his human perfection that is reflected in his theological works.¹²

c) Nicholas, without participating in the Hesychast dispute, proved himself to be a follower and supporter of the theology of the Hesychasts, developing their statement about the important role of the sacraments and the Liturgy in defining the spiritual identity of the faithful :

The Byzantine Church in the 14th century was in very delicate situation : the necessity of obtaining the help of the Catholic West against the growing power of the Ottomans made the question of Church unity one of central importance, culminating in the Council of Ferrare-Florence in 1438-1439. The life of the Byzantine Church in the 14th century was thus characterized by the fight between pro-unionist and against-unionist clergy.¹³

The victory of the Hesychast doctrine during the synod of Constantinople in 1351 brought about the possibility of Hesychasts gaining access to the patriarchal see of Constantinople. The presence in this period of such Hagioritic patriarchs as Isidoros I Boucheiras (1347-1350), Kallistos I (1350-1353, 1355-1363) and Philotheos Kokkinos (1353-1354, 1364-1376), gave a new living impulse to the spiritual and liturgical life of the Byzantine Church.¹⁴

¹² Cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Nicola Cabasilas e il suo tempo », 44-45.

¹³ Cf. D. J. GEANAKOPOLOS, *Byzantium. Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1984, 131, 136-137, 143; cf. J. M. HUSSEY, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990, 256-257, 260-267, 286-294; cf. M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, « Deux patriarches palamites en rivalité: Kallistos et Philothée », in *Le Patriarcat Œcuménique de Constantinople aux XIV^e-XVI^e siècles: rupture et continuité, Actes du colloque international Rome, 5-6-7 décembre 2005* (Dossiers Byzantins - 7), Centre d'études Byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris 2007, 37-53.

¹⁴ Cf. R. F. TAFT, *Storia sintetica del rito bizantino*, Libreria editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1999; cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Deux patriarches palamites en rivalité », 37-53;

Cabasilas entered into this context with his two important works, *The Life in Christ*, and *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, the latter being considered as a continuation of the former.¹⁵ These works reveal him to be a supporter of the sacramental mysticism typical of Palamite theology : so Cabasilas recognized the essential value of Hesychasm without ever having participated in the theological controversy itself.

We must not forget that, already in the years of his youth, when he lived in Thessaloniki, Nicolas attended the Hesychast circles founded either by Gregory Palamas (present in Thessaloniki since 1325) or by Isidoros Boucheiras, a disciple of Gregory of Sinai. In these circles, Hesychast spirituality was proposed to the lay people, so they could lead a profound spiritual life while continuing to live in the world. From the letters that Nicholas Cabasilas wrote to his father from Constantinople, we learn that in his hometown, he had a spiritual father, a faithful disciple of Gregory Palamas and the future metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Dorotheos Blates (1371–1379). We already mentioned that Nicolas had spent a year with Palamas on Mount Athos, experiencing first hand the precepts of Hesychastic spirituality and had friendly relations with the leading exponents of Hesychasm¹⁶.

It is equally true that Cabasilas, along with his friends John Kantacouzenus and Demetrios Kydones, belonged to the circles of those who loved Greek antiquity, and therefore intended to be an opponent of Palamitic doctrine¹⁷. M.-H. Congourdeau points out that some

see also R. F. TAFT, « At the Sunset of the Empire: The Formation of the Final 'Byzantine Liturgical Synthesis' in the Patriarchate of Constantinople », in *Le Patriarcat œcuménique de Constantinople aux XIV^e-XV^e siècles: rupture et continuité. Actes du colloque international Rome, 5-6-7 décembre 2005* (Dossiers Byzantins 7) Centre d'études Byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, Écoles des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris 2007, 55–71; T. POTT, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform. A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition* (Orthodox Liturgy Series), St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York 2010; S. PARENTI, « Da Gerusalemme a Costantinopoli passando per Stoudios e Mar Saba: una liturgia modello per l'Ortodossia », in *Da Costantinopoli al Caucaso: imperi e popoli tra Cristianesimo e Islam*, edd. C. Alzati – L. Vaccaro, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2014, 99–120.

¹⁵ Cf. P. PÉRICHON, « Introduction », in NICOLAS CABASILAS, *Explication de la Divine Liturgie*, edd. S. A. A. Salaville – R. Bornert – J. Gouillard – P. Périchon, *SCH 4bis* (1967) (= *Liturgie*), 15; cf. G. GHARIB, « Nicolas Cabasilas et l'explication symbolique de la liturgie », *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 10 (1960), 116–117.

¹⁶ Cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Introduction », in *La Vie*, *SCH 355* (1989), 12–14.

¹⁷ As for example J. A. Demetrapoulos, who made an attempt to define Cabasilas as clearly anti-palamist : cf. G. A. DEMETRAKOPOULOS, « Nicholas Cabasilas' 'Quaestio de rationis valore': an Anti-Palamite Defense of Secular Wisdom », *Byzantina* 19 (1998), Kentro Byzantinôn Ereunôn Aristoteleiou Panepistêmiou, Thessalonikê 1998, 53–93.

scholars have indeed been led to consider the figure of Cabasilas as being either in favor or against Palamitic doctrine. She states though that now there is an attempt to overcome this dramatic dichotomy.¹⁸

2. PALAMAS AND CABASILAS : THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE OF THE FAITHFUL AS THE FOUNDATION OF A CORRECT SPIRITUAL LIFE

Despite the apparent diversity in the theological views of Palamas and Cabasilas, there are many similarities in their doctrines.¹⁹ The point I want to discuss is the importance of spiritual experience as a true foundation for the correct spiritual life of the faithful. In speaking about experience, both writers follow the Greek patristic tradition, and especially Maximus Confessor, for whom the knowledge of God arrives thanks to sacramental and ascetical experience, and Symeon the New Theologian, who points out the importance of developing the spiritual senses in order to become aware of God's grace given through the sacraments.²⁰

Both writers defend the dignity of the human body, capable of receiving grace and being in communion with God,²¹ and both empha-

¹⁸ Cf. M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, « Nicolas Cabasilas et le Palamisme », in *Gregorio Palamas e oltre. Studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino*, ed. A. Rigo (Orientalia Veneziana XVI), Leo S. Olschki, Firenze 2004, 192-194; cf. J. MEYENDORFF, *San Gregorio Palamas e la mistica ortodossa*, Gribaudi, Milano 1997, 75-78; cf. B. BOBRINSKOY, « Nicolas Cabasilas et la spiritualité hésychaste », in *La pensée orthodoxe* (1966), 21-42 ; L. BIANCHI, « Divinizzazione ed eucaristia: Palamas e Cabasilas a confronto », *Donorum commutatio. Studi in onore dell'arcivescovo Ioannis Spiteris, OFM Cap. Per il suo 70mo genetliaco*, ed. I. Asimakis (Analecta Teologica 5), Vicariatus Apostolicus Thessalonicensis, Thessaloniki 2010, 303-314; cf. SPITERIS, *Cabasilas, teologo e mistico bizantino*, 19; cf. S. RUNCIMAN, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance*, University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1970, 72-73.

¹⁹ This subject was already well presented by Boris Bobrinskoy in the afore mentioned article « Nicolas Cabasilas et la spiritualité hésychaste » as well as in his Introduction to the English translation of *The Life in Christ*: NICHOLAS CABASILAS, *The Life in Christ*: edd. C. J. De Catanzaro - B. Bobrinskoy, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, Crestwood (NY) 1974, 17-42. So here we will mostly concentrate our attention on the texts of Cabasilas.

²⁰ Cf. P. MIQUEL, *Le vocabulaire de l'expérience spirituelle dans la tradition patristique grecque du IV^e au XIV^e siècle* (Théologie Historique 86), Beauchesne, Paris 1989, 124, 161-164.

²¹ Showing the importance of human body which is able to experience God together with the soul and spirit, both authors deserve to be named among the greatest Christian humanists of their time: cf. J. MEYENDORFF, « Humanisme nominaliste et mystique chrétienne à Byzance au XIV^e siècle », *Nouvelle revue théologique* 79 (1957), 906, 911, 914; cf. GHARIB, « Nicolas Cabasilas et l'explication symbolique de

size the importance of the sacraments in the Christian life and personal perfection through prayer. The sacraments play a central role in Palamas' explanation of the deification of man by grace ; he argues, in fact, that the opening of God to humanity is mystically revealed in the liturgical life. The Eucharist, therefore, is seen as a participation in the deified humanity of Christ and as the fulfillment of eternal life. Through union with the body of Christ in the Eucharist, man is enlightened by His presence just as the disciples of Jesus were on Mount Tabor. Although this illumination by the uncreated light happens on an inner level, in silence, in prayer and spiritual warfare, Palamas never separates this experience from the sacred mysteries. Therefore, it is not possible outside of the liturgical life. One cannot ignore this perspective when speaking of Hesychasm.²²

Without intending to establish any harsh comparisons between these authors, we will say that Palamas seems to reserve this spiritual experience to Hesychast monks, who arrive at a mystical experience of God after a certain progress in ascetic experience, while Cabasilas defends a kind of Hesychasm that can be practiced by everyone in daily life.²³

Thus, in Palamas' theology we can distinguish three kinds of experience :

- 1) *the experience of evil*, in all its forms (temptation, sin, death) ;
- 2) *ascetic experience* or mortification (retirement from the world to preserve inner peace, poverty, fasting, temperance of body and soul, chastity) ;
- 3) *mystical experience* or experience of God's presence in contemplation.

This experience

- is opposed to rational knowledge ;
- provides the foundation of faith ;
- is immediate and progressive ;
- is the key to all problems of spiritual life ;
- does not come without pain and suffering ;
- is incommunicable.

Palamas, especially in his Homilies, warns against the experience of evil, while exhorting his hearers to ascetic and mystical experience.²⁴

la liturgie », 115; cf. H.-G. BECK, « Humanismus und Palamismus », in *Rapports du XIF Congrès international d'études byzantines (Ochrid, 10-16 Septembre 1961)*, Comité Yougoslave des études byzantines, Belgrade, Ochrid 1961, 77.

²² Cf. J. MEYENDORFF, *La teologia bizantina. Sviluppo storici e temi dottrinali*, Marietti, Casale Monferrato (AL) 1984, 96-97.

²³ Cf. CONGOURDEAU, « Nicolas Cabasilas et le palamisme », 199-202; cf. RUNCIMAN, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 72-73.

²⁴ Cf. MIQUEL, *Le vocabulaire*, 171-181.

Cabasilas concentrates his attention mostly on sacramental experience, which for him it is not merely an aesthetic emotion of those who attend liturgical solemnities, but the reception of the sacraments that gives birth to and develops the sense of God ; this real contact between God and the faithful is, in fact, the essence of sacramental experience according to Cabasilas. He shows that it is impossible to acquire this experience if the person does not penetrate into the sacramental space, which means to receive and to develop the grace given by God in the mysteries. Sin is like an anaesthetic that renders man incapable of any spiritual experience, while the sacraments restore in him that supernatural sensitivity and receptivity given by grace.²⁵

The concept of spiritual experience in Cabasilas is developed along the following lines :

- sacramental experience is superior to intellectual knowledge ;
- it fulfills all human desires and overcomes them (cf. 1 Cor 2: 9) ;
- every Christian is able to enjoy sacramental experience ;
- sacramental experience is the foretaste of eternal life ;
- this experience gives the joy which is the fruit of the Spirit.²⁶

M. Lot-Borodine discerns another aspect of experience in Cabasilas, which is the love of God : to be able to understand the greatness of God's love for man is, for Cabasilas, the foundation of all virtues.²⁷

3. THE LIFE IN CHRIST OF NICOLAS CABASILAS : THE BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL SENSES THROUGH SACRAMENTS

As we said, it is important to place the person in a liturgical context in order to talk about the experimental nature of grace in the sacraments. Before Nicholas Cabasilas other Greek writers, such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite († 5th cent.), Maximus the Confessor († 662), Patriarch Germanus († 733), and Symeon the New Theologian († 1022) reflected on the importance of liturgical space, on the symbolism of the Divine Liturgy, on the liturgical prayers and on the interconnection between the universe, governed by God and the universe formed by the human body. Tracing an overview of these authors, Hans-Joachim Schulz notes that, among these, Cabasilas

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 183-188.

²⁷ Cf. M. LOT-BORODINE, *Un maître de la spiritualité byzantine au XIV^e siècle: Nicolas Cabasilas*, Éditions de l'Orante, Paris 1958, 83. See also M. LOT-BORODINE, « Le cœur théandrique et son symbolisme dans l'œuvre de Nicolas Cabasilas », *Irénikon* 13 (1936), 652-673.

distanced himself from an excessive symbolic interpretation of the heavenly liturgy ; rather, his main concern was to make the liturgical symbolism in relation to the memory of the death and resurrection of the Lord both transparent and understandable. Thus, Cabasilas not only emphasized the similarity of the liturgical rites with the mysteries of the life of Christ, but also pointed out that the mystery of Christ, while unseen, is at the same time perceived, experienced and present in the liturgical and sacramental life of His Church.²⁸

The person of faith, in fact, must be born and perfect himself and his faith through the experience of personal encounter with God in the liturgy. Nicholas Cabasilas, in this sense, can be considered a true reformer, one who calls man to reform himself by conforming to God, and so become capable of reforming the Church, the liturgy, others, and the world.²⁹ Sacramental experience is essential in this reformation of oneself and of the world, because it infuses into the faithful the grace that gives them an immediate perception of God, and this perception is produced by the invisible touch of God's light on the soul.³⁰

For Cabasilas, the sacraments are the passages (he uses the words *windows* or *doors*³¹) through which God's grace enters into a man, and it is important to prepare one's own spiritual senses to be receptive of this grace.³² Cabasilas indeed speaks often about the need to conserve the grace given through the sacraments ;³³ in this respect, the role of the inner senses is crucial, since once individuals are able to see and to feel the greatness of what is given by God, they will do anything to preserve it.

²⁸ Cf. H.-J. SCHULZ, *The Byzantine Liturgy. Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, Pueblo Publishing Company, New York 1986, 25-49, 67-132, 190-192. It's also interesting to note how on pages 193-196 Schulz is able to explain Cabasilas' capacity to resolve in a non-polemical way the question of sacrifice in liturgy, the author indeed presents Nicholas Cabasilas « as witness to the ecumenical faith ». See also R. BORNERT, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VI^e au XV^e siècle* (Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 9), Paris 1966.

²⁹ Cf. POTT, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform*, 78-79.

³⁰ Cf. *La Vie* II, 97, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³¹ Cf. *La Vie* I, 21; I, 29, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³² If we do not prepare our spiritual senses in present life, we will be blind and unable to feel all the happiness God prepared to us in future life : cf. *La Vie* I, 1, *SCh* 355 (1989) ; in the sacred mysteries we receive the inner eye, and we should use it to see God's light: cf. *La Vie* II, 58-59, *SCh* 355 (1989); through it the person receives the deeper knowledge of divine things: cf. *La Vie* II, 102, *SCh* 355 (1989); it is impossible for someone who has no eyes to have an experience of light; anyone, so to say, who does not develop this inner sight, becomes spiritually sterile ; cf. *La Vie* IV, 108, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³³ Cf. *La Vie* I, 16; I, 66; III, 19, *SCh* 355 (1989); *La Vie* VI, 1; VII, 1, *SCh* 361 (1990).

The action of grace does not depend on the readiness of the person ; this action is equally strong and continuous throughout one's lifetime. Nevertheless, it is more fruitful in a person whose inner eye is ready to see the divine ray.³⁴ In using the concept of « eye », Cabasilas means our inner guide,³⁵ and this role can be carried out by our mind (noûs), or soul (psyché), or spirit (pneûma).³⁶ Hence, the inner senses will be able to hear, taste and smell the beauty of God's grace, which enters into a human soul and returns it to the divine royalty of God's children that was lost through sin.³⁷ While one can experience the fullness of God's grace only in the future life, in the present life it is similar to the experience of an « embryo ».³⁸

In *The Life in Christ* there are three main points on which Cabasilas develops his concept of sacramental experience : Baptism allows the faithful to experience the death and resurrection of the Lord ; Chrismation gives them the possibility of experiencing the action and the presence of the Holy Spirit ; and through the Eucharist they experience the deep and deifying union with God.

The experience of grace in Baptism :

- 1) is immediate and real, because it fully restores in man the form of Christ, such that His presence occupies the whole of a human being ;³⁹
- 2) goes beyond every human imagination ;⁴⁰
- 3) brings to the soul the capacity to touch and taste the mystery of God, destroys one's old life and raises up a new one, and drowns the old man and resurrects a new one ;⁴¹
- 4) puts all the human senses in tune with the Divine will and with God's primordial project regarding man,⁴² illuminates them and purifies them,⁴³ and restores the harmony that was destroyed by sin ;⁴⁴

³⁴ Cf. *La Vie* II, 103-104, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³⁵ Cf. *La Vie* II, 59, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³⁶ In *The Life in Christ* we observe the mostly synonymic usage of these three concepts to describe an inner guide of the person; this inner guide has to be concentrated on God to function correctly: cf. *La Vie* I, 14; II, 88; III, 24; IV, 9; IV, 25-26, *SCh* 355 (1989); cf. *La Vie* VI, 10-11; VI, 38; VI, 82; VI, 88; VI, 90; VII, 33; VII, 87, *SCh* 361 (1990) and others.

³⁷ Cf. *La Vie* I, 1-2, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³⁸ Cf. *La Vie* I, 2-3, *SCh* 355 (1989).

³⁹ Cf. *La Vie* I, 62; II, 11-14; II, 30-31, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴⁰ Cf. *La Vie* II, 16, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴¹ Cf. *La Vie* II, 30; II, 35-36; II, 47-50; II, 95, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴² *La Vie* II, 88, *SCh* 355 (1989): « Cette expérience, le bain l'infuse dans les âmes des baptisés, et il fait connaître le Créateur à la créature, la vérité à l'esprit, au désir le seul désirable. Aussi, grande est l'aspiration, indicible la tendresse, extraordinaire l'amour, car il n'y a rien qui manque, tout s'accorde, rien ne sonne faux, et en outre tout est surabondance ».

⁴³ Cf. *La Vie* II, 24 ; II, 101, *SCh* 355 (1989).

- 5) gives to a man the possibility of experiencing true liberty, which is the liberty of the sons of God ;⁴⁵
- 6) gives the possibility of experiencing new and unknown realities, and especially gives the capacity to pursue the correct spiritual way ;⁴⁶ this is accomplished, however, by giving to a man the necessary divine energy to do it without forcing his will ;⁴⁷
- 7) gives to the man who is able to develop these spiritual senses given in Baptism, an extraordinary love of God and knowledge of divine things, even in this present life ; this is a knowledge that one cannot achieve otherwise ;⁴⁸

Regarding the experience of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of Chrismation :

- 1) this is not only the reception of His gifts, but rather the experience of His very presence and action, since the « wall of separation » between God and man was already demolished by Baptism ;⁴⁹
- 2) It is the activation of the spiritual energies of man by the Holy Spirit, assuring his spiritual maturation ;⁵⁰
- 3) The presence of the Holy Spirit is a connecting power in man's union with the Father and the Son ;⁵¹

⁴⁴ Cf. *La Vie* II, 39-43, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴⁵ Cabasilas very often compares the slavery and dreadfulness of sin with the liberty and beauty of grace, which is the liberty of God's sons: cf. *La Vie* I, 32-37; I, 49; I, 52-53; I, 64; II, 20-21; II, 29-30; IV, 38-40; IV, 82-83; *SCh* 355 (1989) ; cf. *La Vie* VI, 23-24; VII, 80-86; VII, 92; VII, 104-105, *SCh* 361 (1990).

⁴⁶ Cf. *La Vie* II, 44-47, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴⁷ Cf. *La Vie* II, 60, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁴⁸ Cf. *La Vie* I, 2 ; II, 66; II, 76; II, 86, *SCh* 355 (1989); cf. *La Vie* VII, 88; VII, 92; VII, 101, *SCh* 361 (1990).

⁴⁹ Cf. *La Vie* III, 6, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁵⁰ Cf. *La Vie* III, 1; III, 21, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁵¹ *La Vie* III, 3, *SCh* 355 (1989) : « De plus, le Maître lui-même est Christ, non qu'il ait reçu un chrême répandu sur la tête, mais en raison de l'Esprit Saint, parce qu'il est devenu, à cause de la chair qu'il a assumée, le réceptacle de toute l'activité spirituelle. Et il n'est pas seulement Christ, mais aussi chrismation – 'Ton nom est une huile qui s'épanche', dit l'Écriture (Ct 1, 3) –, Christ dès le commencement, et chrismation plus tard. En effet, tant qu'il n'existait pas quelque chose à quoi Dieu pût communiquer ses dons, il était un chrême qui demeure en lui-même ; mais lorsque fut conçue la chair bienheureuse qui a reçu 'toute la plénitude de la divinité' (Col 2, 9) comme dit Jean : 'Dieu donne l'Esprit sans mesure' (Jn 3, 34) et c'est toute la richesse de sa nature qu'il infuse – alors, le chrême une fois épanché sur cette chair est réellement chrismation et en reçoit le nom. Être communiqué, voilà en effet ce que signifiait pour lui : devenir chrismation et être répandu ».

On *Annointed* (Christ) and *Anointing* (divine chrism) see Y. SPITERIS – C. G. CONTICELLO, « Nicola Cabasilas Chamaetos », in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition, II, (XIII^e-XIX^e s.)*, edd. C. G. Conticello – V. Conticello (Corpus Christianorum), Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 2002, 383: « Questa distinzione tra *Unto* (Cristo) e *Unzione* (crisma) è propria di Cabasilas. Secondo lui, il Verbo è Cristo da tutta l'eternità, perché in lui 'riposa' lo Spirito, ma diventa 'Unzione' a partire dall'Incar-

4) The Holy Spirit, given to the person as a gift, comes together with His gifts of wisdom, fortitude, piety, and so forth, and this person can even become a miracle worker. For Cabasilas, however, the growth of the virtues in a person is the principle miracle and the best evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵²

We refer here to the idea expressed by Bobrinskoy that, despite there being some distinction between the spiritual effects of Chrismation and the presence of Christ in the divine chrism, which is identified with Christ, this distinction may be artificial. Only Christ is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He accomplishes in Himself all the graces, all the virtues and spiritual energies that are infused by Chrismation. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, which hypostatically rests in Him and testifies to Christ in the world ; this is the Spirit of adoption that Christ communicates to us, and this Spirit, in His turn, incorporates us into Christ. So when Cabasilas lists the effects of the anointing chrism, these should be considered as a revelation of the work of the divine persons and the living presence of Christ in the initiate.⁵³

The experience of God's grace in Baptism is increased in the holy mystery of the Eucharist :

- 1) While in Baptism the royal form is imprinted into a person's soul, in the Eucharist the body of a King Himself is given to her ;⁵⁴
- 2) Showing in the mystery of the Eucharist the fullness of His Love, Christ penetrates all the human senses, conquering especially the heart ;⁵⁵

nazione, quando assume la natura umana e così può rendere partecipi gli uomini di questa sua unzione e divinizzarli (ungerli con lo Spirito) per grazia. Il *Cristo* (Unto) diventa *Μύρον* (Unzione), comunicando agli uomini il suo Spirito e così li divinizza ».

⁵² Cf. *La Vie* III, 9–10 ; III, 12–13, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁵³ Cf. B. BOBRINSKOY, « Onction chrimale et vie en Christ chez Nicolas Cabasilas », *Irénikon* 32 (1959), 10–11 ; cf. *La Vie* III, 17–18, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁵⁴ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 1, *SCh* 355 (1989). See also IV, 2, where Cabasilas shows us that the overall action of all three holy mysteries allows man to regain the royal clothes of God's sons: « Certes il est présent à chaque mystère; c'est en lui que nous sommes chrimés et baignés, c'est lui qui est notre repas. Mais s'il est uni à ceux qui sont initiés et leur communique ses biens, ce n'est pas de la même façon en tous les rites : quand il baigne, il affranchit l'argile du mal et lui imprime sa propre forme ; quand il chrimme, il rend agissantes les activités de l'Esprit dont lui-même est devenu, à cause de sa chair, la réceptacle. Mais quand il conduit à la Table et donne son corps à manger, il change entièrement celui qu'il initie et lui donne en échange sa propre disposition ; et l'argile n'est plus l'argile, qui a reçu la forme du roi, mais elle-même est devenue corps du roi, et l'on ne peut concevoir plus grand bonheur que celui-là ».

⁵⁵ *La Vie* IV, 8, *SCh* 355 (1989) : « Car ce n'est pas à quelque chose de lui que nous avons part, mais à lui-même ; ce n'est pas quelque rayon et une lumière que nous recevons en nos âmes, mais le disque solaire lui-même, au point de l'habiter et d'en être habités, d'en être ceints et de l'embrasser, d'y être mélangés et de ne former avec lui qu'un esprit (cf. 1 Cor 6, 7). En effet, l'âme et le corps et toutes les facultés

3) Thanks to the participation of man in the redeemed humanity of Christ, the human properties of man assume the properties of Christ, as a piece of iron, when placed in a fire, takes on all the properties of fire without becoming fire itself.⁵⁶ In this sense we can say that in the Eucharist man experiences the fullness of divinity and assumes the responsibility of being a son of God;⁵⁷

4) In the Eucharist the action of God's grace given in Baptism and Chrismation comes to its point of culmination: from one point of view the Eucharist revives it, and from other, it sustains this grace in a man. That is why the Eucharist can be called the culmination of the sacramental experience of the faithful.⁵⁸

The Divine Liturgy thus realizes the entry of the Church into the Kingdom of God, for Christ, assuming and deifying human flesh, becomes the temple of God's presence in this world.⁵⁹ Indeed, in the Eucharist man experiences deifying union with Christ, becoming the same flesh and the same blood with Him,⁶⁰ and through the Eucharist the primordial beauty of man is regained such that the law of the Spirit now prevails in him.⁶¹ This gift has to be preserved by assiduous participation in Holy Communion and with ascetical practice.⁶²

4. A COMMENTARY ON THE DIVINE LITURGY : TO SEE WITH THE EYES, TO FEEL IN ONE'S HEART

In this work Cabasilas goes further in developing his concept of sacramental experience, and here the author is even more explicit in saying that the meeting of the faithful with Christ occurs in the liturgy and it is here that God sanctifies him. The prayers and rites of the liturgy prepare man to receive God's grace and to activate it through

deviennent aussitôt spirituelles, car notre âme est mêlée à son âme, notre corps à son corps, notre sang à son sang ; et qu'en résulte-t-il ? le meilleur et le plus fort l'emporte sur le plus faible, le divin domine l'humain ; comme dit Paul à propos de la résurrection : 'le mortel est absorbé par la vie' (2 Cor 5, 4), et par suite : 'je vis, mais non plus moi, c'est le Christ qui vit en moi' (Gal 2, 20) ».

⁵⁶ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 26-27, *SCh* 355 (1989); see also IV, 7-9 ; IV, 79.

⁵⁷ *La Vie* IV, 80, *SCh* 355 (1989) : « Voilà pourquoi nous sommes tous tenus non d'apporter les fruits de la sagesse humaine, ni de tenir bon jusqu'aux combats suprêmes du martyre, mais de vivre cette vie nouvelle qu'est la vie en Christ : voilà la justice dont nous avons tous à faire preuve ». See also IV, 81 ; IV, 85.

⁵⁸ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 11-12, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁵⁹ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 20, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁶⁰ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 9-10 ; IV, 25-29 ; IV, 68 ; IV, 77, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁶¹ Cf. *La Vie* IV, 31-35 ; IV, 42, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁶² Cabasilas develops this idea in the last two books of *The Life in Christ*; for him, ascetical practice is not some kind of mortification but mostly the inclination to the good of a person's own proper will and proper thoughts, and thus a practice possible to anybody.

liturgical participation and the practice of the virtues ; at the same time, it is Christ's presence that sanctifies man through liturgy.⁶³ So, in this work, as in *The Life in Christ*, we can see that for Cabasilas theological doctrine cannot be separated from liturgical participation.

Here Cabasilas again points out the importance of the spiritual senses. The liturgical symbolism serves this purpose : when the eyes become able to see the plenitude of divine mercy in the liturgical actions and the mind becomes consonant with it, meditating Christ's work of salvation, this is the way in which the soul enflamed with God's love.⁶⁴

This meditation brings spiritual fruits, however, only if the person is attentive to everything that is happening : our thoughts and our feelings must be in unison with the mysteries celebrated in the liturgy.⁶⁵ Even the position of the body is important, and for Cabasilas it is necessary to acquire a combative attitude and a watchful spirit when we converse with God and participate in the sacred mysteries : there must not be any distraction, but with fervor and reverence we must watch, listen and pray throughout the liturgy.⁶⁶

This sacramental experience thus gives to the faithful the possibility to perceive the presence of Jesus, covered by the veil of the sacraments.⁶⁷ The union with Christ that occurred in Baptism has to be strengthened through assiduous participation in Holy Communion ; otherwise, man remains as an eye without light.⁶⁸

⁶³ Cf. *Liturgie* I, 1–6.

⁶⁴ *Liturgie* I, 12: « à lui remettre notre vie, à enflammer nos cœurs au feu de son amour. Ainsi disposés, nous pouvons en toute assurance et simplicité nous approcher du brasier des augustes mystères ».

Liturgie I, 14: « Voici pourquoi a été imaginé le symbolisme dont j'ai parlé, qui ne se borne pas à signifier tout cela par des paroles, mais le met entièrement sous nos yeux, et cela visiblement à travers tout le cours de la liturgie: c'est, d'une part, pour agir plus facilement sur nos âmes, ne pas nous offrir une simple vision, mais encore déposer en nous un sentiment, car une représentation visuelle peut produire en nous une impression plus profonde. Et c'est, d'autre part, pour ne point donner prise à l'oubli, et pour ne pas laisser la pensée se tourner vers un autre objet jusqu'au moment où nous sommes conduits à la table sacrée. Remplis alors de ces pensées et ayant la mémoire en toute sa vigueur, nous participons aux divins mystères, ajoutant de la sorte sanctification à sanctification, celle du rite à celle des contemplations, 'transformés de clarté en clarté' (II Cor. 3, 18), c'est-à-dire de la clarté inférieure à celle qui est la plus grande de toutes ».

⁶⁵ Cf. *Liturgie* I, 13; XXI, 2–4 ; XXVII, 1.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Liturgie* XXI, 5–6.

⁶⁷ *Liturgie* XXXIX, 2: « Les fidèles, pour montrer leur respect et leur foi, adorent, en bénissant et proclamant la divinité de ce Jésus que leur esprit sait présent sous ces espèces ».

⁶⁸ Cf. *Liturgie* XLIV, 1–3.

This is the way of sanctity for the Church, a sanctity that is meant not as a perfection already achieved, but as the path to the perfection.⁶⁹ Everything is already given by Christ ; the action of grace cannot be hindered by any human fault, although it can be blocked by man's negligence.⁷⁰ In this way, sacramental experience assumes a leading role in Cabasilas' teaching. According to him, the only thing requested from man is purity of soul, the love of God, ardour for the sacraments, and zeal.⁷¹ The real, helping, and healing presence of Christ in the liturgy is often emphasized by Cabasilas,⁷² so that when the faithful pray to Christ in the liturgy to « conserve them in sanctity », this means that they are asking God to help them to preserve the divine grace received through sacraments.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Liturgie* XXXVI, 1: « Il prend le Pain de vie et, le montrant au peuple, il appelle à la communion ceux qui sont en état d'y participer dignement : 'Les choses saintes aux saints', s'écrie-t-il. Comme pour dire : Voici sous vos yeux le Pain de vie. Accourez donc pour le recevoir, non pas tous, mais ceux qui en sont dignes. Car les choses saintes ne sont permises qu'aux saints. Le prêtre donne ici le nom de saints non pas seulement aux âmes de vertu parfaite, mais aussi à tous ceux qui s'efforcent de tendre à cette perfection, mais ne l'ont pas encore atteinte. Ceux-là, rien ne les empêche, en participant aux saints mystères, d'être sanctifiés et, de ce point de vue, d'être saints. C'est en ce sens que l'Église tout entière est appelée sainte, et que le bienheureux Apôtre, écrivant à l'ensemble du peuple chrétien, s'exprime ainsi : 'Frères saints, qui entrez en partage d'une vocation céleste'. Les fidèles sont en effet appelés saints en raison de la chose sainte à laquelle ils participent, et de Celui au corps et au sang duquel ils communient. Membres de ce corps, chair de sa chair et os de ses os, tant que nous lui restons unis et que nous sommes en consonance avec lui, nous avons la vie, attirant à nous, par les mystères, la sainteté qui découle de cette Tête et de ce Cœur. Mais si nous venons à nous séparer, si nous nous détachons de l'ensemble de ce corps très saint, c'est en vain que nous goûtons aux saints mystères : la vie ne passera plus aux membres morts et amputés ».

⁷⁰ *Liturgie* XXXIV, 4-5: « Le Saint-Esprit donne la rémission de leurs péchés à ceux qui communient à ces dons sacrés. Que cette grâce, dit le prêtre, ne soit pas, en ce qui me concerne, écartée de ces dons à cause de mes péchés. On sait que la grâce agit de deux manières dans les dons sacrés : premièrement, en tant qu'ils sont eux-mêmes sanctifiés ; secondement, en ce que par eux la grâce nous sanctifie. L'action de la grâce sur les dons, celle de la première manière, exige notre zèle, et c'est pourquoi notre négligence peut lui faire obstacle. La grâce, en effet, nous sanctifie par les dons sacrés, à condition qu'elle nous trouve convenablement disposés pour la sanctification ».

⁷¹ Cf. *Liturgie* XLII, 6.

⁷² Cf. *Liturgie* XVIII, 7: here Cabasilas speaks about the church as the house of Living God.

⁷³ Cf. *Liturgie* XLI, 3-4.

5. CONCLUSION : UNDERSTANDING HESYCHASM AS WALKING IN GOD'S PRESENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Analyzing the two main works of Cabasilas, we come to the conclusion that they are the best example of how theological doctrine and liturgical practice can remain in perfect harmony.

According to Cabasilas, the main task of every Christian is to preserve the divine grace given to man through the sacraments. Indeed, it is through the sacraments and the liturgical participation of the faithful that this deification is fulfilled, so that we, participating in the wedding banquet of the liturgy in this life, can prepare for ourselves royal clothes for the heavenly banquet of the Lamb in the life to come.⁷⁴

Referring to the sacredness of the human body as a temple of God,⁷⁵ and pointing out the importance of all the human senses in acquiring the sacramental experience that guides man to obtain inner peace and union with God, Cabasilas goes further in developing Hesychast teachings about prayer. He says that only if we are able to remain in peace with ourselves will we be able to pray for others and for the world.⁷⁶ This peace is acquired not by following a special method of prayer but by living the life of faith in everyday life. For Cabasilas, a man of faith is one who with a steady character is able to harmonize all the inner forces in his soul.⁷⁷

Cabasilas himself was the perfect example of such a man, and remains a perfect example of a great thinker, who without totally renouncing secular wisdom, managed to put aside any logical principle to plunge into the ocean of faith, where logic must remain silent.

Klara Nadiya KOBELYUKH

SUMMARY

In his two main works, *The Life in Christ* and *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, Cabasilas points out that the mystery of Christ, while unseen, is at the same time perceived, experienced in the sacramental life of His Church. The individual must be born and perfect himself and his faith through a personal encounter with God in the liturgy. Sacramental life is essential here : indeed, for Cabasilas, the sacraments are the doors through which God's

⁷⁴ Cf. *Liturgie* XIII, 6-9; cf. *La Vie* I, 8-9; II, 44-45; II, 57; IV, 30; IV, 109, *SCh* 355 (1989).

⁷⁵ See as an example *La Vie* VI, 22-25, *SCh* 361 (1990).

⁷⁶ Cf. *Liturgie* XII; see also XXVI, 2; cf. *La Vie* VI, 82-83, *SCh* 361 (1990). In saying this we intend to highlight that the main point of the article is to avoid any opposition between Palamas and Cabasilas. It seeks rather to show how the doctrine of Hesychasts on spiritual experience is developed by Cabasilas.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Liturgie* XIV, 3.

grace enters into a man. The author explains how to prepare one's spiritual senses to be receptive of this grace. Without preparation in the present life, in the future life we will be blind and unable to feel all the happiness God prepared to us. In the sacred mysteries we receive the inner eye and we should use it to see God's light and gain a deeper knowledge of divine things ; whoever does not develop this inner sight becomes spiritually sterile. The prayers and rites prepare the faithful to receive God's grace and to activate it through liturgical participation and the practice of the virtues ; Christ's presence sanctifies them through the liturgy. The liturgical symbolism helps the physical eyes to see the plenitude of divine mercy in the liturgical actions and the mind becomes consonant with it, meditating Christ's work of salvation. So the soul becomes enflamed with God's love. The sanctity of the Church is thus conceived not as a perfection already achieved, but as the path to perfection. Everything is already given by Christ, and the action of grace cannot be hindered by any human fault, even if it can be blocked by human negligence.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ses deux œuvres principales, *La Vie en Christ*, et *Explication de la la Divine Liturgie*, Cabasilas met l'accent sur le mystère du Christ invisible et, en même temps perçu, expérimenté dans la vie sacramentelle de Son Église. La personne doit naître et perfectionner soi-même et sa foi par la rencontre personnelle avec Dieu dans la liturgie. La vie sacramentelle est ici essentielle car, pour Cabasilas, les sacrements sont les portes par lesquelles la grâce de Dieu pénètre dans l'homme ; l'auteur explique comment préparer ses sens spirituels à être réceptifs à cette grâce. Sans préparation dans la vie présente, dans la vie future nous serons aveugles et incapables de sentir tout le bonheur que Dieu nous a préparé. Dans les saints mystères nous recevons l'œil intérieur et nous devrions nous en servir pour voir la lumière de Dieu et avoir une connaissance plus profonde des choses divines ; celui qui ne développe pas ce regard intérieur devient spirituellement stérile. Les prières et les rites préparent l'homme à recevoir la grâce de Dieu et à la rendre active par la participation liturgique et par la pratique des vertus; la présence du Christ sanctifie l'homme par la liturgie. Le symbolisme liturgique aide les yeux physiques à voir la plénitude de la miséricorde divine dans les actions liturgiques et l'esprit entre en accord avec elle, en méditant sur l'œuvre de salut du Christ, ainsi l'âme s'enflamme de l'amour de Dieu. Ainsi la sainteté de l'Église est conçue non comme une perfection déjà accomplie, mais comme le chemin vers la perfection. Tout a été déjà donné par le Christ, et l'action de la grâce ne peut être entravée par quelque faute humaine, bien qu'elle puisse être bloquée par la négligence de l'homme.