

TEMPLUM DEI

A DOGMATIC ELUCIDATION

AND ITS ICONOGRAPHY

IN IMAGES OF THE ANNUNCIATION

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EDITORIAL SINDÉRESIS

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**Templum Dei. A dogmatic elucidation and its iconography in images of
the Annunciation**

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O beata Dei genitrix, virgo Maria, templum Dei vivi, aula
Regis aeterni, sacrarium Spiritus sancti. (Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Oratio*
LV. Ad eandem sanctam Virginem Mariam. PL 158, 961)

Oh, blessed Mother of God, Virgin Mary, the temple of
the living God, the royal palace of the eternal King, the tab-
ernacle of the Holy Spirit. (Saint Anselm of Canterbury, *Oratio LV. Ad eandem*
sanctam Virginem Mariam. PL 158, 961)

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INTRODUCTION

We have discovered some surprising findings in our constant, careful research into Christian doctrine primary sources (biblical, patristical, theological, lyrical). For more than a millennium –from at least the mid-3rd century to the end of the 15th— Greek-Eastern and Latin Church Fathers and theologians coincide in designating the virginal mother of Christ through many poetic metaphors. Among them, we can highlight “a stem at Jesse's root,” “the Aaron's flourished stick,”¹ “the Eastern closed door” (*porta clausa*), “the bridal bed of God (*thalamus Dei*),”² “the temple or the tabernacle of the godhead” (*templum Dei* or *Deitatis*), “the triclinium of the Trinity” (*triclinium Trinitatis*), “the closed garden” (*hortus conclusus*),³ “the sealed fountain” (*fons signatus*), or other similar symbolic figures, almost all extracted from, or related to some passages of the Old Testament.

In this book, we will focus our attention only on testimonies of Greek-Eastern and Latin Church Fathers and theologians who interpret some expressions, such as “temple,” “sanctuary,” “*Sancta Sanctorum*,” “tabernacle,” “Ark,” “urn,”

¹ See our articles “*In virga Aaron Maria ostendebatur*. A new interpretation of the stem of lilies in the Spanish Gothic *Annunciation* from patristic and theological sources”, *De Medio Aevo*, 5/2 (2016), 117-144; and “*Sanctitate vernans virga Aaronis*. Interpretation of the stem of lilies in the medieval iconography of *The Annunciation* according to theological sources”, *Art Studies and Architectural Journal* 10/9 (2015) 2-32.

² See our article “The symbol of bed (*thalamus*) in images of *The Annunciation* of the 14th-15th centuries in the light of Latin Patristics”, *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies* 5/4 (2019) 49-70.

³ See José María Salvador-González, “*Hortus conclusus*. A Mariological metaphor in some of Quattrocento's Annunciations according to Church Fathers and theologians”, *Scripta Mediaevalia*, 15-1 (2022) (in press).

“abode of the Most High,” or other similar metaphors referring to spaces or containers reserved for God.

The surprise increased when we discovered that all the Eastern and Western Christian masters we have analyzed interpret these expressions unanimously as poetic metaphors of God the Son's incarnation in Mary's virginal womb and Mary's virginal divine motherhood. However, it should be pointed out that, despite their substantial unanimity of criteria when interpreting the expressions above as metaphors for God the Son's incarnation in Mary's virginal womb, the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians adopted three exegetical variants.

These three variants are not antithetical but complementary, depending on the emphasis given to one or the other protagonist of this incarnation. Most authors assumed an exclusively Mariological variant, which considers that the *templum Dei* and other similar expressions symbolize Mary, specifically her virginal womb. Some other writers adopted a Christological option, recognizing that these metaphors represent Christ, specifically the human body or nature to which He united his divine nature when incarnating. Finally, only a few thinkers preferred a third, double variant, Mariological and Christological, as they consider that these expressions mean both Christ's body and Mary's womb because God the Son took his human body from the uterus of the Virgin.

The short echo that this vast and profound subject has had in the academic universe is quite surprising. As far as we know, the Mariological and Christological interpretation of

the *templum Dei* symbol and other analogous metaphors by the medieval Fathers and theologians does not seem to have deserved an accurate, in-depth study by most specialists.⁴

It is evident in any case that the systematic, grounded analysis of *templum Dei* metaphor according to the double exegetical, Mariological and Christological, interpretation given by the Church Fathers and medieval theologians is absent in the dogmatic studies that we know about the Virgin Mary, while only sporadically there is some isolated and unjustified allusion to it. One can find such silence on the subject in typical Mariology treatises, such as those by Gregorio Alastruey,⁵ Stefano de Fiores,⁶ Bruno Forte,⁷ Manfred Hauke,⁸ Gerhard Ludwig Müller,⁹ Stefano de Fiores, V. Ferrari Schiefer & S. M. Perrella,¹⁰ and José Cristo Rey García Paredes.¹¹

⁴ Of course, you can find from time to time some exceptional papers related to this issue, such, for example, L. M. di Girolamo, “Maria, tempio e santuario del Signore”, *Miles Immaculatae* 39 (2003), 159-229; and Antonio María Calero, “María, templo por ser Madre”, *Estudios Marianos* 68 (2012), 95-124.

⁵ Gregorio Alastruey, *Tratado de la Virgen Santísima*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952.

⁶ Stefano de Fiores, “Mariología”. In Giuseppe Barbaglio & S. Dianich (dirs.), *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología. Volumen I. A. Testamento-Mariología*, Milano, San Paolo Edizioni, 1982, 984-1019.

⁷ Bruno Forte, *María, la mujer icono del misterio. Ensayo de mariología simbólico-narrativa*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 1993.

⁸ Manfred Hauke, *Introducción a la Mariología*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2015.

⁹ Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Dogmática. Teoría y práctica de la teología*, Barcelona, Herder, 1998.

¹⁰ Stefano de Fiores, V. Ferrari Schiefer & S. M. Perrella (dirs.), *Mariología* (Dizionari San Paolo), Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), Edizioni San Paolo, 2009.

¹¹ José C. R. García Paredes. *Mariología*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Auto-

A similar omission present most Mariological monographs, such as those by Ignace de la Potterie,¹² Hugo Rahner,¹³ Domiciano Fernández,¹⁴ Johannes Ratzinger & Hans Urs von Balthasar,¹⁵ Stefano de Fiores,¹⁶ Miguel Ponce Cuéllar,¹⁷ Fernando Sebastián,¹⁸ or Jesús Casás Otero.¹⁹

Nor are analytical studies on the interpretation of the *templum Dei* or other similar metaphorical expressions according to the ancient and medieval exegetical tradition, in chapters or voices about the Virgin Mary in some dictionaries or encyclopedias of a theological or Mariological subject. Such is the case of *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique et de Liturgie*,²⁰ *Enciclopedia Cattolica*,²¹ *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología*,²² *Nuevo Dic-*

res Cristianos, 2015.

¹² Ignace de la Potterie, *Marie dans le mystère de l'Alliance*, Paris, Desclée, 1988.

¹³ Hugo Rahner, *María y la Iglesia*, Madrid, Editorial Cristiandad, 2004.

¹⁴ Domiciano Fernández, *María en la historia de la salvación. Ensayo de una mariología narrativa*, Madrid, Publicaciones Claretianas, 1999.

¹⁵ Johannes Ratzinger & Hans U. von Balthasar, *María, Iglesia naciente*, Madrid, Encuentro, 2006.

¹⁶ Stefano de Fiores, *María Madre de Jesús. Síntesis histórico-salvífica*, Salamanca, Secretariado Trinitario, 2003.

¹⁷ Miguel Ponce Cuéllar, *María, madre del Redentor y de la Iglesia (Manual de Mariología)*, Barcelona, Herder, 2013.

¹⁸ Fernando Sebastián, *María, Madre de Jesús y Madre nuestra*, Salamanca, Sígueme, 2013.

¹⁹ Jesús Casás Otero, *Tota Pulchra. María, esplendor de la belleza divina*, Salamanca, Secretariado Trinitario, 2015.

²⁰ E. Dublanchy, “Marie”. In F. Cabrol & H. Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1927, Tome 9, 2e Partie, col. 2339-2474.

²¹ VV.AA., “María Santísima - Madre di Gesù Cristo, Figlio di Dio fattosi uomo”. In VV.VV. *Enciclopedia Cattolica*. Città del Vaticano: Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico, 1952, vol. VIII, col. 76-118.

²² Giuseppe Barbaglio & S. Dianich (dirs.), *Nuovo Dizionario di*

cionario de Mariología,²³ *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*,²⁴ or *Histoire des dogmes. Les signes du salut. Tome III. L'étude des sacrements, de l'Eglise et de la Vierge Marie du XIIe au XXe siècle*.²⁵

Despite this oblivion and this lack of in-depth studies on this specific matter, a finding is undeniable: since at least the first half of the 3rd century and for almost a millennium and a half –up to at least the end of the 15th century– you can document countless testimonies both in Eastern and Western Christendom that metaphorically consider the Virgin Mary as “the temple of God,” “the Sanctuary of Deity,” “a tabernacle,” “the Sancta Sanctorum,” “the ark of the New Covenant,” “an altar,” or other similar analogies alluding to spaces or containers reserved for God.

These concordant and interconnected interpretations of Eastern and Western Christian masters constructed and consolidated a robust doctrinal heritage in the universal Church. Moreover, founded on this solid doctrinal tradition, many

Teologia. Vol. I. A. Testamento – Mariología, Milano, San Paolo Edizioni, 2000. (Spanish translation: *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología, vol. I. A. Testamento – Mariología*, Madrid, Ediciones Cristiandad, 1982).

²³ Stefano de Fiores & S. Meo (dirs.), *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*, Madrid, San Pablo Ediciones, 1988.

²⁴ Angelo di Berardino (dir.), *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, Casale Monferrato, Marietti, 1983, 2 vols.

²⁵ Henri Bourgeois, Bernard Sesboué & Paul Tihon (dirs.), *Histoire des dogmes. Les signes du salut. Tome III. L'étude des sacrements, de l'Eglise et de la Vierge Marie du XIIe au XXe siècle*, Paris, Desclée Mame, 2016. (Spanish translation: H. Bourgeois, B. Sesboué & P. Tihon (dirs.), *Historia de los dogmas. Tomo III: Los signos de la salvación*, Salamanca, Secretariado Trinitario, 1995). See in this Spanish edition the text of Bernard Sesboué, “Tercera Parte. La Virgen María”, 425-470.

hymnographers composed an uncountable series of devotional hymns in the Middle Ages, alluding in their stanzas to the *templum Dei* and the other metaphors above.

So, seeking a clearer understanding of this problem, we have divided the analysis of this specific subject into the three following chapters: Chapter 1 will deal with the interpretations of Greek-Eastern Fathers on the matter; Chapter 2 will expose the similar exegetical comments from the Latin Fathers and theologians; Chapter 3 will present a large set of fragments of medieval Latin hymns referring to the metaphorical expressions above.

On the other hand, our frequent examination of the images of medieval religious art from Italy, Flanders, France, Spain, Germany, and other European countries soon revealed the existence of many paintings of the Annunciation in whose scenery the house of Mary exhibits a precise shape of temple, or chapel. Such a finding could not surprise us since, as the essential content of the medieval Christian images is based on doctrinal texts, it was easy to suppose that the many exegetical comments mentioned above would reflect in the Christian iconography.

Because of both findings, in Chapter 4, we will examine fourteen paintings of the Annunciation from the 14th and 15th centuries that include the house of Mary shaped with a more or less explicit aspect of a temple. So, the comparative analysis of both sets, the doctrinal texts and the artistic images will allow us to deduce some reasonably founded iconographic interpretations of these fourteen Annunciations.

In the end, our meticulous double study of primary textual sources and images of the Annunciation offered us many satisfactory answers to the problem of this unusual temple, which we have published in various academic articles.²⁶ So, the current book –which synthesizes, reformulates, expands, and deepens the main results of those articles— intends to explain, with arguments drawn from these primary sources of Christian doctrine, the motives why many Italian, Flemish, French, German, Spanish, and other European artists depicted the modest Nazarene house of Mary through the astonishing shape of a temple.

²⁶ We have dealt with this topic in the articles “*O Virgo, templum Dei sanctum*. Simbolismo del templo en imágenes de la Virgen María en los siglos XIV-XV según exégesis patrísticas y teológicas”, *Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, 22 (2017), 359-398. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ILUR.57421>; “The temple in images of the Annunciation: a double dogmatic symbol according to the Latin theological tradition (6th-15th centuries)”, *De Medio Aevo*, 9 (2020), 56-68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5209/dmae.69014>; “Iconographic interpretation of the temple as a theological symbol in images of The Annunciation of the 14th and 15th centuries”, *Fenestella. Inside Medieval Art*, 1 (2020): 23-41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13130/fenestella/12672>; “Latin theological interpretations on *templum Dei* until the Second Council of Constantinople (553): a double Christological and Mariological symbol”; “Greek Fathers’ interpretations of *templum Dei* as a double theological metaphor (3rd-9th centuries)”, *Volynskyi Blahovisnyk*, 8 (2020): 127-145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33209/2519-4348-2707-9627-2020-8-77>; “Latin theological interpretations on *templum Dei*: A double Christological and Mariological symbol (6th-15th centuries)”, *Teología y Vida* 62/4 (2021), 525-553; “Latin theological interpretations on *templum Dei* until the Second Council of Constantinople: a Mariological and Christological symbol”, *Veritas. Revista de Filosofía y Teología*, 49 (2021): 115-133. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-92732021000200115>.

CHAPTER 1

**GREEK-EASTERN FATHERS INTERPRETATIONS ON *TEMP-
PLUM DEI* AND OTHER SIMILAR METAPHORS**

The current chapter will chronologically present a set of comments through which many Fathers of the Greek-Eastern Churches interpreted the expressions *templum Dei*, *Sancta Sanctorum*, *sanctuarium Trinitatis* *tabernaculum*, and other similar metaphors as references to God the Son's incarnation. According to their respective emphasis, these interpretations can express two quite different, although complementary, projections: Mariological and Christological.

We will quote the texts of these Greek-Eastern Christian authors from the Greek Patrology compiled by Jacques-Paul Migne in 166 volumes between 1857 and 1867.²⁷ Nonetheless, in some cases, we will also use the collection of Marian patristic texts edited by Sergio Álvarez Campos between 1970 and 1985.²⁸ Furthermore, to ease the communication of these Greek-Eastern texts, we will quote them according to the Latin translation brought by J.-P. Migne, and Sergio Álvarez Campos in their respective compilations.²⁹

In the first half of the 3rd century, Origen (c. 185-c. 254) states in his sixth homily about the Exodus that the sentence of *Proverbs*, "Wisdom has built her house," should be understood as a metaphor for God the Son's incarnation.³⁰ In his opinion, the temple of the flesh of Jesus was built in Mary without human intervention, as Daniel prophesied by indicat-

²⁷ Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1857-1867, 166 vols. Hereafter quoted as PG.

²⁸ Sergio Álvarez Campos (ed.), *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, Burgos, Aldecoa, 1970-1985, 8 vols.

²⁹ All translations and paraphrases into English of these Greek-Eastern texts included in the current chapter are our own.

³⁰ Origenes, *In Exodum Homilia VI*. PG 12, 340.

ing that a stone not cut by a human hand became a high mountain, which is another symbolic figure of Christ's incarnation without masculine interference.³¹

In another sermon, Origen points out that, since after the Savior's incarnation, "the truth was born from the earth and justice looked from heaven," the shadows and imitations were eliminated;³² that is why Jerusalem and its temple fell, and neither Mount Gerizim nor Jerusalem were already convenient places to worship God, but the true worshipers of the Father must worship him in spirit and truth.³³ The author then contrasts the material temple of Jerusalem with the spiritual temple, which is Christ. So, Origen asserts that with the current truth brought by Jesus, imitation and shadow were finished, and, now being present, this temple (God the Son incarnate) which was built in Mary's womb through the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Most High, the temple of

³¹ "Audi sapientiam dicentem, quia 'aedificavit sibi domum'. Ego autem hoc de incarnatione Domini rectius intelligendum puto. Non enim manu hominum factum est, id est, non opere humano templum carnis aedificatur in virgine, sed, sicut praedixerat Daniel, lapis sine manibus excisus crevit, et factus est mons magnus. Istud est sanctimonium carnis assumptae, et sine manibus, id est, absque opere hominum, de monte humanae naturae et substantiae carnis excisum." (Origenes, *In Exodum Homilia VI*, PG 12, 340).

³² "Cum vero in adventu Salvatoris nostri Dei e coelis descendens 'veritas de terra orta est, et justitia de coelo prospexit,' umbrae et exemplaria ceciderunt." (Origenes, *Homiliae in Librum Iesu Nave. Homilia XVII*, 1. PG 12, 909-910).

³³ "Cecidit enim Jerusalem, cecidit templum, altare sublatum est, uti jam neque in monte Garizim, neque in Jerosolymis sit locus ubi oportet adorare, sed veri adoratores qui adorant Patrem, in spiritu et veritate adorent." (Ibid.).

Jerusalem, made with stones by men, collapsed (ceased to be valid).³⁴

It is clear that, unlike many later authors, Origen identifies the *templum Dei* or the house of Wisdom with Christ's body (the Christological interpretation), not with Mary's womb (the Mariological understanding). We will see that these two interpretative variants of *templum Dei*—as a symbol of the body of Christ, or as a symbol of Mary and, more specifically, of her virginal womb—will alternate among Christian thinkers who run on this topic. Even some of them adopt a bivalent position by defending at the same time both exegetic options, considering them substantially complementary.

In the 4th century, Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/264-c. 339/340) retook this Christological variant when interpreting the biblical verse “[God] has set his tabernacle in the Sun:” this sentence means, according to Eusebius, that He laid his seat and tabernacle on the body He took from the Virgin Mary, who was like the tabernacle of the divine power residing in it.³⁵

Two or three decades later, Ephrem the Syrian (c. 307-373) adopts the Mariological interpretation. In a hymn for Jesus' Nativity, he states that “She [Mary] is a royal palace for you, oh Son of the King [God the Father], and the Sancta Sancto-

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “‘in sole posuit tabernaculum suum;’ sol deitatem innuit, in qua sedem suam et quasi tabernaculum posuit, vel quod ex Virgine sumpsit corpus, quod quasi tabernaculum erat divinae potestatis in eo permanentis. Hic est ‘tanquam sponsus procedens de thalamo suo; exultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam’.” (Eusebius Caesariensis, *Eclogae propheticae. Liber II*, 10. PG 22, 1105).

rum for you, oh [heavenly] Priest.”³⁶ In another suggestive song, Ephrem says that Mary is the pure temple, in which God stayed, the eternal hero, in whom the mystery that God became man was admirably fulfilled.³⁷

About twenty years later, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390) writes down in a poem that it is often said that from the Virgin's womb, God became man, to whom the Holy Spirit joined when building the holy temple (Christ's body) in the temple of Christ, that is Mary.³⁸ A few verses later, he adds that, after the Virgin conceived Him in her womb filled by the deity, the divine Word gestated in her womb, put on himself a solid flesh, and filled the temple (his human body) with the pure divinity, so possessing both natures, human and divine, and keeping himself as one God.³⁹

³⁶ “Aula regalis illa est per te, o Regis Fili; et Sancta Sanctorum per te, o summe Sacerdos!” (Ephraem Syrus, *Hymni de Nativitate* 17, 5. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, 1970, vol. II, 492).

³⁷ “Maria templum est purum, in quo divertit Deus, aeternus heros; et ibi expletum est mirabili modo Mysterium per quod homo Deus factus est et Adamus a Patre filius appellatus est.” (Ephraem Syrus, *Carmina Sogita* 1, 38 y 40. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, 1970, vol. II, 517).

³⁸ “Versatur in ore non paucorum hic sermo, scilicet e sinu Virginis ortum esse Deum hominem, quem coagmentavit Spiritus magni Dei, templo templum sanctum exstruens. Mater enim Christi templum, Christus autem Verbi.” (Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Poemata quae spectant ad alios*, 7. PG 37, 1565-1566).

³⁹ “Postquam autem illum condidit et visceribus deitate implevit, Eduxit in lucem peracto tempore (quo in utero gestandus erat), Tunc crassam carnem induit, et implevit templum Pura divinitate rex Verbum. Utraque autem natura Unus erat mihi Deus.” (Ibid.).