


**Latin theological interpretations on *templum Dei*  
A double Christological and Mariological symbol (6th-15th  
centuries)**

JOSÉ MARÍA SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ

*Department of Art History*

*Complutense University of Madrid*

jmsalvad@ucm.es

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6854-8652>

*Abstract:* This article aims to underline the exegetical comments given from the 6th to 15th centuries by some Latin Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers on several metaphorical expressions, such as *templum Dei*, *tabernaculum*, *domicilium Deitatis*, *arca*, and other similar terms referring to spaces or containers reserved for the godhead. The article uses as a methodological strategy the comparative analysis of Latin Christian primary sources: the writings of the Church Fathers and theologians and the medieval liturgical hymns. After collecting the large set of exegetical comments in this regard, the comparative analysis of these texts confirms that all the Latin Christian sources analyzed here coincide in interpreting the metaphorical expressions above as eloquent symbols of God the Son's incarnation in Mary's virginal womb. However, beyond this significant concordance, these Christian thinkers brought during these ten centuries three different, inherently interconnected, and complementary exegetical variants: one, strictly Mariological; a second one, strictly Christological; the third, as a binary option, Mariological and Christological at the same time.

*Keywords:* Christ's incarnation, divine motherhood, Virgin Mary, Mariology, Christology, Latin Patrology.

*Resumen:* El presente artículo pretende destacar los comentarios exegéticos de algunos Padres, teólogos e himnógrafos latinos desde los siglos VI al XV sobre diversas expresiones metafóricas, como *templum Dei*, *tabernaculum*, *domicilium Deitatis*, *arca*, y otros términos similares referidos a espacios o contenedores reservados para la divinidad. Hemos utilizado como estrategia metodológica el análisis comparativo de las fuentes primarias del cristianismo latino: los escritos de los Padres y teólogos de la Iglesia y los himnos litúrgicos medievales. Después de recoger el amplio conjunto de comentarios exegéticos al respecto, el análisis comparativo de esos textos nos permite confirmar que todos los maestros cristianos latinos aquí analizados coinciden en interpretar las mencionadas expresiones metafóricas como símbolos elocuentes de la encarnación de Dios Hijo en el seno virginal de María. Sin embargo, más allá de esta significativa concordancia, estos pensadores cristianos produjeron durante estos diez siglos tres variantes exegéticas diferentes, intrínsecamente interconectadas y complementarias: una, estrictamente mariológica; una segunda, estrictamente cristológica; la tercera, como opción binaria, mariológica y cristológica a la vez.

*Palabras clave:* encarnación de Cristo, maternidad divina, Virgen María, mariología, cristología, Patrología Latina.

## INTRODUCTION

All along with our constant and meticulous research into primary sources of Christian doctrine, we have found with surprising reiteration and growing coincidence several metaphorical allusions with which many Fathers and theologians of the Latin and Greek-Eastern Churches designate the Virgin Mary for her condition of Mother of God the Son incarnate. For more than a millennium, indeed –from at least mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>— countless thinkers of Eastern and Western Christian doctrine coincide in designating the virginal mother of Christ with the poetic metaphors “stem at Jesse’s

root,"<sup>1</sup> "Aaron's flourished stick,"<sup>2</sup> "Eastern closed door" (*porta clausa*), "bridal bed of God (*thalamus Dei*),"<sup>3</sup> "temple or tabernacle of the godhead" (*templum Deitatis*), "triclinium of the Trinity" (*triclinium Trinitatis*), "closed garden" (*hortus conclusus*),<sup>4</sup> "sealed fountain" (*fons signatus*), or other similar symbolic figures, almost all of them extracted from known passages of the Old Testament.

In this article, I will focus my attention only on testimonies of Fathers and theologians of the Latin Church who dogmatically interpret some expressions referring to spaces or containers reserved for God, such as "temple," "sanctuary," "*Sancta Sanctorum*," "tabernacle," "Ark," "urn" or other similar terms. To further explore the Latin exegetical tradition about these metaphors, I have divided the study into two complementary articles: in the first one I analyze this tradition from the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the Second Council of Constantinople (553);<sup>5</sup> on the other hand, in this article I will continue that investigation from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, both articles greatly complement and enrich the first

---

<sup>1</sup> See J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "Flos de radice Iesse. A hermeneutic approach to the theme of the lily in Spanish Gothic painting of *The Annunciation* from patristic and theological sources", *Eikón Imago* 2/2 (2013) 183-222; and J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "Flos campi et lilium convallium. Third interpretation of the lily in the iconography of *The Annunciation* in Italian Trecento art from patristic and theological sources", *Eikón Imago* 3/1 (2014) 75-96.

<sup>2</sup> See J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "In virga Aaron Maria ostendebatur. A new interpretation of the stem of lilies in the Spanish Gothic *Annunciation* from patristic and theological sources", *Eikón Imago* 2/1 (2013) 1-48; and J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "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.

<sup>3</sup> See J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "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.

<sup>4</sup> See J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "Hortus conclusus. A Mariological metaphor in some of Quattrocento's *Annunciations* according to Church Fathers and theologians", *Finxit* 1 (2021) (in press).

<sup>5</sup> J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "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) 119-137.

approach that I have made on the subject, including statements from Fathers of the Greek-Eastern Churches.<sup>6</sup> In these three articles, I study in chronological sequence the commentaries of Christian thinkers on the topic under scrutiny to appreciate more clearly the evolution of Christian doctrine regarding these dogmatic implications.

Now, as will be clear at the end of this article, all the Fathers and theologians studied here interpret with substantial unanimity the aforementioned metaphorical expressions as eloquent symbols of the incarnate Son in Mary's virginal womb according to three possible exegetical variants: the first strictly Mariological, according to which these metaphors symbolize Mary and, more specifically, her virginal womb; another one strictly Christological, according to which such symbolic expressions signify the body or human nature in which God the Son incarnated; the third —rather exceptional— exegetical variant, simultaneously Mariological and Christological, considers these metaphorical expressions as simultaneous and complementary symbols of Mary and the human body of Christ.

This last paragraph already announces the core results of the present article, which substantially coincide with those obtained in the aforementioned published research on the Latin Fathers between the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the Second Council of Constantinople (553). In that previous published research, I attempted to elucidate some theological interpretations coming from such prestigious thinkers as St. Zeno of Verona, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Gaudentius of Brescia, Rufinus of Aquileia, St. Jerome, St. Maximus of Turin, St. Augustine, St. Peter Chrysologus, St. Leo the Great, Arnobius Junior, Coelius Sedulius, Pseudo-Origen, Pseudo-Augustine, and St. Just of Urgell.

In the present article, I now record and analyze the more or less similar exegetical glosses proposed by the Latin Fathers and theologians of the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries on the metaphorical expressions mentioned above.

---

<sup>6</sup> We have made a general approach to this subject in the paper J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, "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.

## 1. EXEGESES OF LATIN FATHERS AND THEOLOGIANS OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> TO 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES ON *TEMPLUM DEI* AND OTHER SIMILAR METAPHORS

Perhaps towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> the fine Italian poet and hymnographer St. Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530 – c. 607/09), bishop of Poitiers, was one of the members of the relatively small group of thinkers who defended the two exegetical variants. Like St. Peter Chrysologus did a century and a half before, however, he kept them separated, without integrating them into a joint thesis. Nevertheless, in some texts such as in a commentary on the Creed, Venantius Fortunatus adopts the strictly Christological interpretation, declaring that Christ, born of God the Father from eternity, later built his temple (his body) by the grace of the Holy Spirit: in his opinion, indeed, just as in the sanctification of the divine Spirit there is no fragility, so neither corruption appeared in his birth so that the one who is the Only-Begotten in heaven and an only-begotten on earth deigned to enter the world through the door of the Virgin Mary.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from this Christological gloss, Venantius resolutely takes up the predominant Mariological interpretation of the metaphors under analysis in most of his remaining comments. Thus, in one of his poems in honor of the Virgin Mary, he exclaims:

The sanctuary [virginal womb] of Mary gestates  
The one who the land, the sea, and the air  
Honor, worship, and preach,  
the one that governs the triple structure [of the universe]<sup>8</sup>

And some verses later, he continues:

Blessed Mother for the gift  
Because of her supreme architect,

---

<sup>7</sup> VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, *Miscellanea. Liber XI, Caput I. Expositio Symboli* (Patrologia Latina 88; Paris 1862) col. 348.

<sup>8</sup> “Quem terra, pontus, aethera  
Colunt, adorant, praedicant,  
Trinam regentem machinam:  
Clastrum Mariae bajulat.” (VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, *Miscellanea. Liber VIII. Caput IV. De sancta Maria* (Patrologia Latina 88; Paris 1862) col. 265). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Latin to English included in the current paper are by its author.

Who contains the world in his fist,  
Is locked under the ark of her womb.<sup>9</sup>

Venantius Fortunatus expresses in another poem that “Who chose for himself a temple in a Virgin, what does he mean by that, but that one must preserve the gifts of chastity?”<sup>10</sup>

Probably by those same decades, the influential pope St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) compares the Virgin in the Annunciation with a “rich abode” and a “high mountain” through these suggestive metaphorical expressions:

The most blessed always Virgin Mary Mother of God can be designated by the name of this mount [of Ephraim] [...]. This mountain was undoubtedly at the top of the mountains because the height of Mary shone above all saints. Because, just as mount means height, so house means room. Indeed, mount and house are applied with all property [to Mary], who, while illustrating herself with incomparable merits, prepared her sacred womb to shelter the only begotten Son of God. [...] And [Mary] would not become the house of the Lord if the deity of the Word of God did not rest in her womb through his incarnation as a man.<sup>11</sup>

In the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, St. Ildefonsus of Toledo (607-667) is one of the few thinkers of Christian doctrine who, preferring in

---

<sup>9</sup> “Beata Mater munere,  
Cujus supernus artifex,  
Mundum pugillo continens,  
Ventris sub arca clausus est.” (VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, *Miscellanea. De sancta Maria*, col. 265).

<sup>10</sup> “Qui templum sibi elegit in virgine, quid docet nisi dona pudicitiae custodire?” (VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, *Miscellanea 10, 1, 32. Expositio orationis Dominicae* [Patrologia Latina 88; Paris 1862] col. 318).

<sup>11</sup> “Potest autem hujus montis nomine [Ephraim], beatissima semper virgo Maria Dei Genitrix designari [...]. Mons quippe in vertice montium fuit, quia altitudo Mariae supra omnes sanctos refulsit. Nam sicut mons altitudinem, ita domus designat habitationem. Mons quippe et domus apte dicitur, quae dum incomparabilibus est illustrata meritis, Dei unigenito, in quo recumberet, sacrum praeparavit uterum. [...] Et domus Domini non fieret, si in ejus ventre, per assumptam humanitatem, verbi divinitas non jaceret.” (GREGORIUS MAGNUS, *In Librum I Regum Expositiones* [Patrologia Latina 79; Paris 1862] col. 25).

several texts the strictly Mariological variant, defends in at least one text the two simultaneous exegetical variants. Among his texts that reveal the Mariological option, it is interesting to highlight a treatise on virginity, written against three infidels. In this treatise, he states that Mary is the one that the Psalm 18 designate as “the nuptial room of God” because, from her womb, the God incarnate comes out as the husband leaves his nuptial room, preserving intact the honor of her perpetual virginity.”<sup>12</sup>

This author defends a similar thesis, when in another book about the perpetual virginity of Mary he asserts that the Almighty God is the architect of this building (Mary’s womb), for he enters it as God without a dress (without human body) and gets out of it dressed in the flesh; so he came to the house built by him (Mary’s womb), where he took the dress of the flesh and the same one who went came back, but getting out in a different way (with flesh) to which he entered (without flesh).<sup>13</sup> The exact position is adopted by Ildefonsus when in another passage of this same apologetic treatise he expresses about the Virgin: “This woman is the vessel of sanctification, she is the eternity [perpetuity] of virginity, she is the mother of God, she is the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, she is the singularly unique temple of her Creator.”<sup>14</sup>

On the contrary, in at least one text attributed to him, St. Ildefonsus defends the two exegetical versions, Mariological and Christological, but not separately, as did Peter Chrysologus and Venantius Fortunatus, but integrating them both in a single thesis, when considering the expressions under scrutiny as simultaneous

---

<sup>12</sup> “Haec virgo in psalmo thalamus Dei est, quia de utero ejus iste incarnatus Deus processit velut sponsus, in ea relicto perennis virginitatis decore mansuro (Psal. XVIII).” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Liber de virginitate perpetua S. Mariae adversus tres infideles*, III [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 60).

<sup>13</sup> “Omnipotens est artifex aedificii hujus. [...] Absque veste Deus, ut ita dicam, ingreditur; qui, ut certe dicam, carne vestitus egreditur. Ad domum sui operis venit, carnis tantummodo vestem tulit. Idem qui venerat rediit, sed aliter quam incesserat ipse procedit.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Liber de virginitate perpetua*, 61).

<sup>14</sup> “Haec femina sanctificationis vas est, aeternitas virginitatis est, mater Dei est, sacrarium sancti Spiritus est, templum singulariter unicum factoris sui est.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *De Virginitate perpetua Sanctae Mariae adversus tres infideles Liber Unicus. Caput X* [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 95).

metaphors of Mary's virginal womb and Christ's human body. If a first sermon attributed to him on Mary's Assumption is his own,<sup>15</sup> St. Ildefonsus states: in her Assumption, Mary joyfully enters heaven as the mother of God, for being at another time (when conceiving Jesus) the temple of the Creator, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, the tabernacle of God, as all the treasures of Wisdom and Science (God) are hidden in her womb, in which the divine Word became incarnate, and all the fullness of deity dwells.<sup>16</sup>

However, Ildefonsus right away complements and integrates this Mariological variant with the Christological one when affirming: Christ is the temple of the Word in a very different way as the Virgin is since the womb of Mary was the shelter from which Christ God came out to us, as the husband comes out from his bridal room.<sup>17</sup> Now –the author goes on–, Christ is God and man in one person, not that one is God, and another is man separately as if the temple of God (that means, the body or human nature of Christ) and the divine Word were two different entities. Still, they are the identical Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Hence Christ, though dying was immortal like God, is however considered to have died as he is substantially united to his human nature; therefore, it is not true that the temple (the body or the human nature of Jesus) is one thing and the Word of God is another very different entity. Still,

---

<sup>15</sup> Jacques-Paul Migne puts among the dubious works (*dubii*) of St. Ildefonsus this first sermon on the Assumption, as well as the other four sermons (third, fourth, sixth and seventh) on the same Marian theme that we will mention below.

<sup>16</sup> "Ad quas itaque nuptias hodie beati Dei genitrix cum gaudio introivit, quae fuit olim conditoris templum, Spiritus sancti sacrarium; sacrarium, inquam, Dei, quia omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae in ejus utero sunt reconditi (Coloss. II, 3), quo et Verbum caro factum est, in quo habitat omnis plenitudo divinitatis." (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo Primus. De Assumptione Beatissimae et gloriose Virginis Mariae* [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 241).

<sup>17</sup> "Sed tamen longe aliter Christus templum Verbi, aliter beata Virgo, quia uterus Virginis ac si hospitium fuit, ex quo Christus Deus ad nos, quasi sponsus de thalamo suo, potentia fortis ut gigas, exiit." (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo Primus. De Assumptione*, col. 241).

<sup>18</sup> "Porro Christus Deus et homo, unus mediator Dei et hominum fuit (I Tim. II, 5); non alter Deus, alter homo, ut templum et Verbum duo essent; sed unus idemque Christus Jesus." (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo Primus. De Assumptione*, col. 241).



the temple (the human nature) and the divine Word form a single person, Christ. And, as he is a unique and identical person, he cannot be divided according to essence neither in the passion and death on earth nor in the majesty of heaven.<sup>19</sup>

In his fourth sermon on the same Marian feast, St. Ildefonsus dedicates to the Virgin Mary, for her condition as the mother of God according to the flesh or human nature, a series of metaphorical praises, among which: “descending from Abraham’s seed, of Juda’s tribe, stem from the root of Jesse, from the distinguished lineage of David, star of the sea, servant of the Lord, queen of nations, Lady of the kings, Spouse of the Lord, temple of the Creator, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, beautiful as a dove, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, standard of God, reparation of Eve, the gate of Heaven, honor of women, a closed garden, a sealed fountain, a pond of living waters.”<sup>20</sup>

In the following two texts to be analyzed below, Ildefonsus takes up the strictly Mariological thesis. Thus, in the sixth sermon (also attributed to him) on the Assumption, he points out that on that day, the perpetual Virgin Mary ascends to heaven, where she is exalted above the choirs of angels and placed on the celestial throne to the right of God the Father because people believe that she is –and so they call her– “the temple of the Lord and the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> “Et quia unus idemque, nec in passione dividi potest secundum substantiam, nec in maiestate.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo Primus. De Assumptione*, col. 241).

<sup>20</sup> “Est igitur sancta et venerabilis Virgo Maria, mater Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum carnem, ex semine Abrahae orta, ex tribu Juda, virga de radice Jesse, clara ex stirpe David, filia Jerusalem, stella maris, ancilla Dei, regina gentium, domina regum, sponsa Domini, mater Christi, Conditoris templum, Spiritus sancti sacrarium, velut columba speciosa, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, signaculum Dei, reparatio Evae, introitus vitae, janua coeli, decus mulierum, caput virginum, hortus conclusus, fons signatus, puteus aquarum viventium.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo IV. De Assumptione Beatae Mariae* [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 258).

<sup>21</sup> “Hodie, fratres charissimi, gloriosa et perpetua virgo Maria, coelos ascendit: hodie de terris et de praesenti saeculo nequam erepta, segura de immarcessibili gloria ad coeli pervenit palatia. Hac, inquam, die meruit exaltari super choros angelorum, quoniam, ut credimus, in dextera Patris sublevata in caelestis regni solio post Christum gloriosa resedit, quae merito Domini templum, Spiritus sancti sacrarium et

And in his seventh sermon (also doubtful) on the Assumption, St. Ildefonsus insists that the Virgin Mary is so sainted that the Holy Spirit deigned to come to her; and she is so beautiful that God chose her as a wife, and she is so chaste as to be a virgin after childbirth. That is why she is the temple of God, the sealed fountain, and the closed door of God.<sup>22</sup>

In the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Benedictine reformer St. Peter Damian (1007-1072), bishop of Ostia and cardinal, stands out among the brave defenders of the strictly Mariological version. Thus, in his sermon 14 on the Birth of Mary, after assuming a verse of the Psalms (“Today the one by whom we are all reborn was born, whose beauty the Almighty desired, and in which God put his throne,”)<sup>23</sup> he expresses:

Our Solomon [Jesus Christ] is not only wise, but also the Wisdom of the Father; it is not exclusively peaceful, but it is also our peace, which unified both, [and] made a throne, that is, the womb of the immaculate Virgin, on which this majesty that shakes the orb with a simple sign sat.<sup>24</sup>

In his sermon 46 on the same feast of the Birth of Mary, Peter Damian proclaims: “Today the Queen of the world is born, the window of Heaven, the door of Paradise, the tabernacle of God, the star of the sea, the celestial staircase, by which the supreme King went

---

appellatur et creditur.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo VI. De Assumptione Beatae Mariae* [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 264).

<sup>22</sup> “Videamus itaque, fratres, quae sit haec Virgo tam sancta, ad quam Spiritus sanctus venire dignatus est; quae tam speciosa, quam Deus elegit sponsam; quae tam casta, ut possit esse virgo post partum. Haec est, inquam, Dei templum, fons ille signatus, et porta Dei clausa.” (HILDEFONSUS TOLETANUS, *Sermo VII. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae* [Patrologia Latina 96; Paris 1862] col. 268).

<sup>23</sup> “Hodie nata est illa, per quam omnes renascimur, cujus speciem concupivit Omnipotens, et in qua Deus posuit thronum suum (Psal, XLIV).” (PETRUS DAMIANUS, *Sermo XLIV. I. In Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae (VIII Sept.)* [Patrologia Latina 144; Paris 1853] col. 736).

<sup>24</sup> “Salomon noster [Jesus Christ], non solum sapiens, sed et sapientia Patris; non solum pacificus, sed et pax nostra, qui fecit utraque unum, fecit thronum, uterum videlicet intemeratae Virginis, in quo sedit illa majestas, quae nutu concutit orbem.” (PETRUS DAMIANUS, *Sermo XLIV. I. In Nativitate*, col. 737).

down extremely humiliated."<sup>25</sup> And shortly afterward he adds that today the most splendid Virgin is born from which the most beautiful man, Christ, came out, as the husband comes out from his nuptial bedroom; today the one that deserved to become a temple of divinity is born of the womb of her mother (Anna).<sup>26</sup>

In the last decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian Benedictine theologian St. Anselm of Aosta (1033-1109), archbishop of Canterbury, repeatedly reiterates the metaphors studied here, interpreting them in most cases with Mariological projection. Thus, in one prayer in honor of Mary, he calls her "royal palace of universal propitiation, cause of general reconciliation, vessel, and the temple of life and salvation for all men," before declaring his incompetence to review all the benefits she has given him and the world, who acclaims her as her Lady.<sup>27</sup>

In his 53<sup>rd</sup> sermon in honor of Mary, the archbishop of Canterbury pleads for her help and mercy, extolling her as the inviolate and incomparable Virgin Mother of God, "the most gracious temple of God, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, the gate of heaven," through which the whole world lives after God.<sup>28</sup> Then, in another speech in

---

<sup>25</sup> "Hodie nata est regina mundi, fenestra coeli, janua paradisi, tabernaculum Dei, stella maris, scala coelestis, per quam supernus Rex humiliatus ad ima descendit." (PETRUS DAMIANUS, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia in Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* [VIII Sept.] [Patrologia Latina 144; Paris 1853] col. 753).

<sup>26</sup> "Hodie nata est splendidissima illa virgo, ex qua processit speciosus forma prae filiis hominum tamquam sponsus de thalamo suo (Psal. XLIV). Hodie prodiit ex utero matris, quae templum fieri meruit divinitatis." (PETRUS DAMIANUS, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia in Nativitate*, col. 753).

<sup>27</sup> "Tu aula universalis propitiationis, causa generalis reconciliationis, vas et templum vitae et salutis universorum, nimium contrahe merita tua, cum in me homunculo vili singulariter recenseo beneficia tua, quae mundus amans gaudet, gaudens clamat esse sua." (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Orationes sive Meditationes. VII. Oratio ad Sanctam Mariam pro impetrando eius et Christi amore*, in *Obras completas de San Anselmo*, II [BAC, Madrid 1953] 316).

<sup>28</sup> "O intemerata et in aeternum benedicta, specialis et incomparabilis virgo, Dei genitrix Maria, gratissimum Dei templum, Spiritus Sancti sacrarium, janua regni coelorum, per quam post Deum totus vivit orbis terrarum, inclina aures tuae pietatis, et illos tuos misericordes oculos indignis supplicationibus meis, et esto mihi peccatori pia in omnibus auxiliatrix." (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Oratio LIII. Ad Sanctam*

Marian praise, he exalts the Virgin “Mother of God, [...] temple of the living God, the royal palace of the eternal King, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit”, which for a unique and incomparable privilege and an unheard miracle, made possible for the Word of God, begotten of God the Father before all ages, also to become her son, while being God and man.<sup>29</sup> A few paragraphs later, he begs the Virgin to hear the prayers of the poor and not to despise the groans of miserable humans, as she is “the decorum of the world,” “the nobility of Christian people,” “the queen and lady of the world, the stairs of heaven, the throne of God, the door of paradise.”<sup>30</sup>

In an umpteenth hymn in praise of Mary, the mystic monk greets her with reverence:

Hail, singular Virgin,  
Pleasant virginal palace,  
In whose temple is the Lord  
Whose seat is in heaven.<sup>31</sup>

Several stanzas later, he goes on:

Hail, whose tabernacle  
Was consecrated by the Most High,  
Ray of light from God the Father

---

*Virginem Mariam, et ad Sanctum Ioannem Evangelistam* [Patrologia Latina 158; Paris 1864] col. 960).

<sup>29</sup> “O beata Dei genitrix, virgo Maria, templum Dei vivi, aula Regis aeterni, sacrarium Spiritus sancti. Tu virga de radice Jesse, tu cedrus de Libano, tu rosa purpurea in Jericho, tu cypressus in monte Sion; quae singulari privilegio sicut nescis in omnibus comparationem, ita nihilominus et angelicam superas dignitatem, cui novo et inaudito miraculo datum est ut Verbum quod ante saecula Deus genuit, fieret filius tuus, Deus et homo.” (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Oratio LV, Ad eandem sanctam Virginem Mariam* [Patrologia Latina 158; Paris 1864] col. 961).

<sup>30</sup> “Tu decus mundi. Tu nobilitas populi Christiani. O regina et domina mundi, scala coeli, thronus Dei, janua paradisi, audi praeces pauperum, ne despicias gemitus miserorum.” (PETRUS DAMIANUS, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia in Nativitate*, col. 962).

<sup>31</sup> “Ave, Virgo singularis,  
Placens aula virginalis,  
Cujus in templo Dominus  
Et in coelo sedes ejus.” (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Hymni et Psalterium de Sancta Virgine Maria. Psalterium Dominae nostrae [Pars I]* [Patrologia Latina 158; Paris 1864] col. 1.037).

Become redemption for us.<sup>32</sup>

Instead, in praising Mary in that same hymn, St. Anselm identifies the *templum Dei* with the human body of Christ, now assuming the Christological projection in the interpretation of these metaphors. In this sense, the mystic Benedictine expresses:

Hail, whose son,  
The true temple of God the Father,  
Whom we worship as it suits,  
While we confess our faith in Him.<sup>33</sup>

In the first decades of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Benedictine monk and cardinal Geoffrey of Vendôme (c. 1070-1132) adopt the conventional Mariological variant. Thus, in his fourth sermon on the Nativity of Christ, he explains that “the most beautiful and incomparable Virgin Mary,” from whose womb the Son of God came to us, is not only the temple’s door predicted by the prophet Ezekiel but is also “the temple of the Lord.”<sup>34</sup> In another passage of the same writing, he reiterates that the honorable Virgin Mary, worthy of God, is called “house of the Lord,” whose eastern door was permanently closed; and Mary is called house very justly, that is to say, the temple of God, because God Himself dwelt in it both by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit and by

---

<sup>32</sup> “Ave, cujus altissimus  
Sacrauit tabernaculum,  
Paternae lucis radius  
Factus nobis remedium.” (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Hymni et Psalterium*, col. 1.040).

<sup>33</sup> “Ave, cujus filium,  
Dei Patris verum templum,  
Prout decet, adoramus,  
Dum credentes confitemur.” (ANSELMUS CANTUARIENSIS, *Hymni et Psalterium*, col. 1.045).

<sup>34</sup> “Hodie hortus conclusus ex illa porta recessit, et non illam et per illam fons manavit signatus, de qua propheta dicit: Est porta, quae non aperietur in domo Domini, clausa (Ezech., XLIV, 1). Haec porta templi, et templum Domini est Maria beatissima et incomparabilis virgo, de cujus utero ad nos venit Dei Patris imago.” (GOFFRIDUS VINDOCINENSIS, *Sermo IV. In Nativitate Domini IV* [Patrologia Latina 157; Paris 1854] col. 248).

human conception.<sup>35</sup> Hence, preserving the property of his divine nature, God the Son became flesh in the womb of the Virgin; and, after becoming a true man in body and soul, he was born of a virginal mother leaving through the Eastern closed door of the temple, which neither suffered in its integrity by him nor was opened by any other man.<sup>36</sup>

Some years later, the influential Cistercian reformer St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) is also interested in interpreting with a Mariological projection the metaphors we are studying. Thus, commenting on a sermon for the Christmas vigil the virginal birth of Jesus, St. Bernard admires the “unique, painless, candid, incorruptible delivery; that consecrates the temple of the virginal womb without desecrating it.” Furthermore, he is surprised at “the birth that goes beyond the laws of nature, although it [the birth] transforms it [nature]; unimaginable in the realm of the miraculous, but remedied by the energy of its mystery.”<sup>37</sup>

And in a sermon on Mary’s Purification, St. Bernard puts these questions in the mouth of the Virgin in a rhetorical circumlocution:

Why do I need purification? Why do I refrain from entering the temple, having my womb, without any intercourse, been converted into the temple of the Holy Spirit? Why don't I enter the temple, I who have given birth to the Lord of the temple? In this conception and this

---

<sup>35</sup> “Honorabilis et praedicabilis femina, digna Deo virgo Maria domus Domini appellatur, in qua porta orientalis clausa semper esse perhibetur. Recto nomine Maria, domus, id est templum Domini dicitur, quia Deus ipse habitavit in ea, et per sanctificationem Spiritus, et per humanam conceptionem.” (GOFFRIDUS VINDOCINENSIS, *Sermo IV. In Nativitate*, col. 249).

<sup>36</sup> “Servata itaque divinae proprietate naturae, in utero virginis factus est caro, et perfectus homo in veritate carnis et animae, et per portam templi quae respicit ad Orientem, quae nec per se patuit, nec ab alio aperta fuit, processit de virgine matre.” (GOFFRIDUS VINDOCINENSIS, *Sermo IV. In Nativitate*, col. 250).

<sup>37</sup> “O partus solus sine dolore, solus nescius pudoris, corruptionis ignarus, non reserans, sed consecrans virginalis uteri templum! O nativitas supra naturam, sed pro natura; miraculi excellentia superans, sed reparans virtute mysterii!” (BERNARDUS CLARAEVALLENSIS, *In Vigilia Nativitatis Domini. Sermo Primus, 1*, in *Obras completas de San Bernardo. Edición bilingüe*, III. *Sermones litúrgicos (1<sup>o</sup>)*, [BAC, Madrid 1985] 127-128).

childbirth, there was nothing impure, nor illicit, anything that should be purified: that is evident, being my son the source of purity and coming to purify the sins. What will the legal obedience purify in me, who have been made the most pure in the same immaculate childbirth?<sup>38</sup>

During the following decades, Honorius of Autun, Richard of Saint-Victor, and Peter of Celle adhere to this same Mariological interpretation. The German theologian and scientist Honorius of Autun (c. 1080 – c. 1157) interprets two biblical quotations – *Who created me rested in my tabernacle*, and *He set his tabernacle in the sun* – in the sense that “the always blessed Virgin Mary is the Tabernacle of the Church or God [...], in which God the Son becoming a man rested. From whom he comes out as the husband comes out from his bridal bedroom.”<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Richard of Saint-Victor (c. 1110-1173) affirms in his explanation to the *Song of Songs* that the Virgin Mary, before conceiving God the Son, was preserved from all sin and then confirmed by the power of the Most High so that she could not commit any sin, whereby “she became the temple of God so that she could not be affected by any stain.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> “Quid mihi opus est purificatione? Cur abstinence ab ingressu templi? Cuius uterus, nesciens virum, templum factus est Spiritus Sancti. Cur non ingrediar templum, quae peperit Dominum templi? Nihil in hoc conceptu, nihil in partu impurum fuit, nihil illicitum, nihil purgandum: nimirum cum proles ista fons puritatis sit et purgationem facere venerit delictorum. Quid in me legalis purificet observatio, quae purissima facta sum ipso partu immaculato?” (BERNARDUS CLARAEVALLENSIS, *In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae. Sermo Tertius*, in *Obras completas de San Bernardo*, III, 381).

<sup>39</sup> “Quae congratulando subjungit: Qui me creavit in tabernaculo meo requievit. Tabernaculum Ecclesiae vel Dei est beata semper virgo Maria, ut dicitur: In sole posuit tabernaculum suum (Psal, XVIII, 6). In quo Filius Dei homo veniens requievit, et de quo ut sponsus de thalamo processit (ibid.).” (HONORIUS AUGUSTODUNENSIS, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi exponuntur Cantica Canticorum* [Patrologia Latina 172; Paris 1895] col. 498).

<sup>40</sup> “Ex ante conceptionem quidem Filii Dei prius per gratiam custodita est a peccatis, post hanc vero ita confirmata est ex virtute Altissimi, obumbrata et roborata, ut peccatum omnino committere non potuerit. Ex quo templum Dei facta est, ita privilegiata est ut nullatenus aliqua macula potuerit deturpari.” (RICHARDUS S. VICTORIS, *In Cantica Canticorum Explicatio*, Caput XXVI [Patrologia Latina 196; Paris 1853] col. 482).

At the same time, Peter of Celle (c. 1115-1183), bishop of Chartres, asserts that the Virgin Mary is the only one who pleased God the Father, to the point of deserving to become the mother of his divine Son; she was the only one that, without an example of any kind, pleased Christ, so that he could be born of her, and wished the Holy Spirit, to become his temple to be filled with his presence. Of whom the Savior deigned to be born for us.<sup>41</sup>

And, in another *Treatise on the loaves*, Peter of Celle praises Mary through an ingenious game of relations between three analogies, namely, “temple,” “bridal room,” and “oven” (the latter almost demanded by the central topic of his treatise: the loaves).<sup>42</sup> In this regard, the author assures that the Virgin is not only an oven, upon receiving the Holy Spirit, but is also a temple when conceiving God, and a bridal room when living chastely; she is an oven for conversing with perfect dignity, is a bridal room for conceiving ineffably, and is a temple for offering herself to God as a living and holy host.<sup>43</sup> Going on with his imaginative correlation between these three metaphorical figures, Peter of Celle asserts that the Virgin Mary is an oven to prepare the bread (the Eucharist), which is a matrimonial room to receive the divine Husband, is a temple to introduce the celestial Pontiff. She is an oven (of bread) for food to the hungry, is a bridal room to beget Christians, is a temple to cleanse sins. Finally, she is an oven for the

---

<sup>41</sup> “Virgo Maria [...] sola placuit Deo Patri, ut Filii sui mater fieri mereretur; sola sine exemplo placuit Christo, ut ex ea nasceretur, et Spiritui sancto, ut ejus templum fueret et eo repleretur [...] ex qua pro nobis Salvator nasci dignatus es. Haec est porta per quam Christus ingressus est mundum ad nostram redemptionem, et haec est Virgo per quam reperimus Deum et hominem.” (PETRUS CELLENSIS, *Sermo LXVII. De Assumptione B. Mariae Virginis I* [Patrologia Latina 202; Paris 1855] col. 848-849).

<sup>42</sup> Petrus Cellensis, *Liber De Panibus* [Patrologia Latina 202; Paris 1852] col. 929-1.047).

<sup>43</sup> “Virgo, inquam, hac non solum clibanus est, Spiritum suscipiendo, sed thalamus, Deum concipiendo, templum quoque caste vivendo. Clibanus est, prorsus digne conversando; thalamus ineffabiliter concipiendo; templum, hostiam vivam, sanctam, Deo placentem se offerendo.” (PETRUS CELLENSIS, *Liber De Panibus*, Caput XXI [Patrologia Latina 202; Paris 1855] col. 1.018).



sustenance of life, is a bridal room for the happiness of the embrace, is a temple for the dedication of the new life.<sup>44</sup>

Further squeezing the fruitful rhetorical possibilities of this triple comparison, Peter of Celle goes on to assure, always regarding the Virgin Mary, that the Holy Spirit lights the oven as fire, feeds the wedding room as a Husband, and consecrates the Temple as a Priest; the bread is baked in the oven, the womb is pregnant in the nuptial chamber, the Most High is appeased in the temple; thus a new bread (the Eucharist) comes out of the oven, a new progeny (Christ) comes out of the bridal room, and a renewed plebs (humankind) come out of the temple. Making the most of the conceptual possibilities of this triple metaphorical relationship, the author points out that “The oven does not burn with the burning of libido, nor is the bridal room corrupted or violated by manly contamination, nor is the temple desecrated by infidelity.”<sup>45</sup> Finally, Peter of Celle concludes that “The Virgin Mary: is an oven in her marriage to Joseph, a nuptial room when pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a temple at the birth of the Son [of God incarnate].”<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, the diplomat and poet Peter of Blois (c. 1135 – c. 1203), in a sermon on the birth of the Virgin Mary, states that “God chose her for her many graces to make her his room, in which He rested as if she were a house, a throne (a palace), a bed and a tabernacle (a temple).”<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> “Clibanus ad panem praeparandum; thalamus, ad Sponsum excipiendum; templum ad pontificem intromittendum. Clibanus ad victum esurientium; thalamus ad sobolem Christianorum, templum ad emundationem delictorum. Clibanus vitae sustentationem, thalamus amplexus jucunditatem, templum ad novae vitae dedicationem.” (PETRUS CELLENSIS, *Liber De Panibus*, col. 1.018).

<sup>45</sup> “Non ardet clibanus libidinis ardore; non corrumpitur vel violatur thalamus virili contaminatione, non profanatur templum infidelitatis conspersione.” (PETRUS CELLENSIS, *Liber De Panibus*, col. 1.018).

<sup>46</sup> “Clibanus est Virgo in Joseph desponsatione, thalamus in Spiritus impraegnatione, templum in Filii nativitate.” (PETRUS CELLENSIS, *Liber De Panibus*, col. 1.018).

<sup>47</sup> “Per istas gratias multiplices quasi comprehensus et detentus elegit eam in habitationem sibi. In hac tanquam in domo, tanquam in throno, tanquam in lectulo, tanquam in sacrario requievit.” (PETRUS BLESENSIS, *Sermo XXXVIII. In Nativitate Beatae Mariae* [Patrologia Latina 207; Paris 1855] col. 673).

Around three generations later, the famous Franciscan scholastic master and cardinal St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1217/1221-1274), in his third sermon on Mary's Purification dedicates these metaphorical concepts to the Mother of God:

According to the allegory, the womb of the Virgin is designated with the real name of the temple, in which all Deity inhabited bodily; that is why it is rightly called the temple of God built by divine power, adorned by the divine wisdom, dedicated by the divine grace and filled with the divine presence. Because the construction of this temple is due to the power of the Father; its ornament, [is due] to the wisdom of the Son; its dedication, to the grace of the Holy Spirit; its fullness, to the presence of the incarnate Word. As is "the noble triclinium of the entire divine Trinity," it is, however, a unique temple and abode of the incarnate Word.<sup>48</sup>

Then, the author symbolically explains this temple of God, pointing out that the Virgin Mary is the temple made by God, since she was made a temple of God the Son by the effect of the omnipotence of the divine power, without any disturbing human intervention.<sup>49</sup> Some lines later, he goes on to affirm that "the Virgin Mary is the temple dedicated by the divine grace, in the sense that the abundant mercy of God descended to the Virgin in such a way that it not only sanctified her interior in mind but also her exterior in the flesh, as expressed by the angel: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the

---

<sup>48</sup> "Secundum allegoriam vero nomine templi datur intelligi uterus Virginis, in quo tota Divinitas corporaliter habitavit; et ideo recte dicitur Dei templum fabricatum divina potentia, adornatum divina sapientia, dedicatum divina gratia et adimpletum divina praesentia. Debetur enim huius templi fabricatio potentiae Patris; adornatio, sapientiae Filii; dedicatio, gratiae Spiritus sancti; adimpletio, praesentia Verbi incarnati. Cum enim sit «totius Trinitatis nobile triclinium», est tamen Verbi incarnati speciale templum et hospitium." (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *I. De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III*, in *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe, IV Teología mística* [BAC, Madrid 1963] 563).

<sup>49</sup> "Est igitur primo Virgo Maria templum fabricatum divina potentia [...]. Modus autem aedificandi insinuat tertii Regum sexto, ubi dicitur, quod malleus et securis et omne ferramentum non sunt audita in domo Domini, cum aedificaretur. In quo quidem quid aliud intelligitur, quam quod Virgo Maria facta est templum Filii Dei per omnipotentiam divinae virtutis absque strepitu humanae operationis?" (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *I. De Purificatione*, 563).

Most High will overshadow you.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, Mary was amplified and consummated in grace by the fire of the divine love and, overshadowed by the power of the Most High, was cleansed from all lust to become the ideal temple of Christ.<sup>51</sup>

In his fourth sermon on the Annunciation, St. Bonaventure interprets the sentence of the *Ecclesiasticus* that says *He who created me rested in my tabernacle* in that way: the Creator (*He who created me*) and the inhabitant (*he who rested in my tabernacle*) “are the same person, God, and a man at the same time”; hence whose tabernacle the Lord rested bodily.<sup>52</sup> A few paragraphs, subsequently, St. Bonaventure concludes:

Therefore, the Creator rested in the tabernacle of the virginal entrails, since he established his bridal chamber there to become our brother, for having prepared the royal throne to be our prince, for having assumed the priestly dress to become our Pontiff. By the marital union, the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God; by the royal throne, Queen of

---

<sup>50</sup> “Est etiam tertio templum dedicatum divina gratia, secundum quod insinuatur secundi Paralipomenon septimo ubi dicitur: Sanctificavit Salomon medium atrii ante templum Domini. In quo datur nobis intelligi, quod tam copiosa gratia sanctificationis in Virginem descendit, quod non tantum sanctificavit et dedicavit interius in mente, sed etiam exterius in carne iuxta sermonem Angeli, Lucae primo: Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi.” (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *I. De Purificatione*, 565-566).

<sup>51</sup> “Igne enim divini amoris amplificata et consummata fuit in gratia et virtute Altissimi obumbrata et expurgata fuit ab omni concupiscentia. [...] in quo nihil aliud mtelligimus nisi inflammationem gratiae Spiritus sancti et obumbrationem virtutis Altissimi, ex quorum concursu dedicata est Virgo Maria, ut esset idoneum templum Christi.” (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *I. De Purificatione*, 565-566).

<sup>52</sup> “Qui creavit me requievit in tabernaculo meo. Verbum istud scribitur Ecclesiastici vigesimo quarto, in quo secundum generalem ipsius intellectum describitur divinum habitaculum, et in quantum est a Deo, et in quantum est ad Deum. Describitur enim primo per comparisonem ad actionem Opificis creantis, cum dicitur: Qui creavit me, secundo, per comparisonem ad quietem hospitis inhabitantis, cum subiungitur: requievit in tabernaculo meo. Idem enim est Creator et inhabitator, quia idem est Deus et homo, Alpha et Omega. Secundum autem spirituales intellectus diversis potest satis congrue convenire; nam secundum intellectum litteralem convenit Virgini Mariae, in cuius tabernaculo requievit Dominus corporaliter”. (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *II. De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV*, in *Obras de San Buenaventura*, IV, 626).

heaven; by the priestly dress, advocate of humankind. For all this, the Virgin Mary was suitable, being as she was of the human race, the royal lineage, and the priestly stratum. Say, then, the most beloved Virgin Mary: *He who created me rested in my tabernacle.*<sup>53</sup>

## 2. MEDIEVAL LITURGICAL HYMNS RELATING THE METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS ABOVE

Before further developing this article, it should be stressed that, as a complement to –and perhaps as a result of– the exegetic comments of Fathers and theologians of the Latin and Greek-Eastern Churches, the metaphors analyzed here (*templum Dei, tabernaculum, sacrarium, domus Dei*, and other analogous expressions) are also assumed in many liturgical texts (offices, hymns, antiphons, prayers) and devotional books (breviaries, books of hours and other similar writings for private use). Many of these Latin liturgical hymns have been collected and edited in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by the German historian and archivist Franz Josef Mone in at least three large volumes:<sup>54</sup> the first is dedicated to God;<sup>55</sup> the second deals exclusively with hymns in honor of the

---

<sup>53</sup> “Requievit igitur omnium Creator in tabernaculo uteri virginalis, quoniam in eo statuit sibi cubiculum nuptiale, ut fieret noster frater, praeparavit solium regale, ut fieret noster princeps; assumpsit ornamentum sacerdotale, ut fieret noster pontifex. Propter nuptiale connubium Virgo Maria est Mater Dei; propter regale solium, regina caeli; propter sacerdotale ornamentum, advocata generis humani. Et ad haec omnia idonea erat Virgo Maria, cum esset de genere hominum, de genere regum et de genere sacerdotum. Dicat ergo amantissima Virgo Maria: Qui creavit me requievit in tabernaculo meo.” (BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *II. De Annuntiatione*, 628).

<sup>54</sup> In addition to the three volumes that we will mention below, F. J. MONE published at least this other volume in German translation (F. J. Mone, *Lateinische Hymnen des Mittelalters* [Herder’sche Verlagshandlung, Freiburg im Breslau 1855]).

<sup>55</sup> F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi. E codd. Mss. Edidit et adnotationibus illustravit Franc. Jos. Mone. Tomus Primus. Hymni ad Deum et angelos* (Sumptibus Herder, Friburgi Brisgoviae 1853).

Virgin Mary;<sup>56</sup> the third collects the hymns in praise to the saints.<sup>57</sup> In the following pages, we will quote numerous fragments of medieval liturgical hymns that describe the Virgin Mary as the temple of God or some other metaphors mentioned above. Most of these fragments have been extracted from the aforementioned second volume of Franz Josef Mone.

As a representative illustration of the precious doctrinal value embedded in these medieval liturgical hymns, it is interesting to bring here some eloquent samples. Thus, for example, a 12<sup>th</sup> century hymn in honor of Mary and all the saints extols the Virgin with these poetic verses:

The entire Deity descended  
To the temple of your chest,  
From the land of your body  
The Truth [Christ] has been born to us,  
And the eternal Deity  
Began to exist in time.<sup>58</sup>

A second Marian hymn of the same century –extracted from another collection of medieval hymns by J. F. Mone– praises the Virgin in these terms:

Mary, the temple of the Lord,  
The Tabernacle of the Paraclete,  
The honor of the holy virgins,  
Solace of the afflicted.

---

<sup>56</sup> F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi. E codd. Mss. Edidit et adnotationibus illustravit Franc. Jos. Mone. Tomus Secundus. Hymni ad. B.V. Mariam* (Sumptibus Herder, Friburgi Brisgoviae 1854). Hereafter cited with the abbreviation F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*.

<sup>57</sup> F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi. E codd. Mss. Edidit et adnotationibus illustravit Franc. Jos. Mone. Tomus Tertius. Hymni ad Sanctos* (Sumptibus Herder, Friburgi Brisgoviae 1855).

<sup>58</sup> "Tota descendit Deitas  
In templum tui pectoris  
De terra tui corporis  
Nobis est orta veritas,  
Et aeterna Divinitas  
Incepit esse temporis." ("Hymnus 346. De b.v. Maria," in F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 36).

[...]  
 Illustrious queen of heaven,  
 Sidereal lamp of the world,  
 Remove my stains  
 And the mists of sins.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, the third hymn from this 12<sup>th</sup> century in honor of Mary asks for the protection of the Virgin (calling her the *templum Trinitatis*) with these words:

Rejoice, you temple of the Trinity,  
 In the hands of your piety  
 I entrust myself, light of clarity,  
 To cleanse me of my sins.<sup>60</sup>

Already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Hymn 457, intended to celebrate the seven joys of Mary, proclaims her again as the *templum Trinitatis*:

O Virgin, o temple of the Trinity,  
 The God of great goodness  
 And mercy,  
  
 Who saw the sweetness  
 Of your humility, of your softness  
 And of your fragrance,  
  
 It is announced that it will be born of you,  
 Being sent to you through the angel

---

<sup>59</sup> "Maria, templum Domini,  
 Sacrarium Paracliti,  
 Sanctarum decus virginum,  
 Moerentium solatium.  
 [...]  
 Regina coeli inclyta,  
 Orbis lampas siderea,  
 Meas abstrae maculas  
 Et peccatorum nebulas." ("Oratio ad s. Mariam et ad omnes sanctos," in F. J. MONE, *Lateinische Hymnen*, 15).

<sup>60</sup> "Gaude, templum Trinitatis,  
 In manus tuae pietatis  
 Me commendo, lux claritatis,  
 Ut me mundes a peccatis." ("Hymnus 516. De s. Maria." In F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 300).

The salute of grace.<sup>61</sup>

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a liturgical hymn in honor of Mary in her Assumption to heaven expresses with joy in praise of the one who is acclaimed as the *triclinium Trinitatis*:

On the third day [of Virgin's death], Jesus  
 Visibly descended  
 With the heavenly curia:  
 He exclaimed gracefully  
 And called his mother  
 Telling her with affability:  
  
 Come, mother and lady,  
 Transcend the borders of the earth,  
 All full of grace:  
 Come to eternal glory  
 Temple of the divinity,  
 Triclinium of the Trinity.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> "Virgo, templum Trinitatis,  
 Deus summae bonitatis  
 Et misericordiae,  
  
 Qui tuae humilitatis  
 Et dulcorem suavitatis  
 Vidit et fragantiae,  
  
 De te nasci nuntiatur,  
 Cum per angelum mandatur  
 Tibi salus gratiae." ("Hymnus 457. Septem gaudia b. M. v." In F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 164).

<sup>62</sup> "Cum caelestium curia  
 Descendit die tertia  
 Iesus visibiliter;  
 Gratiose exclamavit  
 Et matrem suam vocavit,  
 Dicens affabiliter:  
 Veni mater et domina,  
 Transcende terrae limina,  
 Tota plena gratia:  
 Veni, templum deitatis,  
 Triclinium trinitatis

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, many of the liturgical hymns that came to light at that time in homage to the Virgin Mary –among them, the six that we will quote below– extol her, proclaiming her the temple of God, the abode of the deity or some other similar metaphors alluding to spaces or containers of the godhead.

So, for example, Hymn 334 on the Annunciation states:

When God the Father,  
wanted his Son to dedicate  
the temple of Mary  
as an example of the humble,  
Then he took pity on the world.<sup>63</sup>

Analogously Hymn 338 on the feast of the Conception of Mary, affirms about the Virgin:

You were the temple of God  
And you delivered the [human] nature  
To the Son of the Creator.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, Hymn 479 praises the Virgin with these brilliant verses:

Rejoice, o temple of Jesus Christ  
Filled with the Holy Spirit,  
You were worthy of removing  
The moans of the unhappy.  
  
You deserved to praise

---

In aeterna gloria.” (Marian hymn of the fifteenth century, quoted by J. M. BOVER, *La Asunción de María. Tratado teológico y antología de textos* (BAC, Madrid 1947) 352-353.

<sup>63</sup> “Humilium  
Pater exemplum  
Mundo tunc condoluit,  
Cum Filium  
Mariae templum  
Dedicare voluit.” (“Hymnus 344. De annunciatione,” in F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 33). I sincerely thank the first peer reviewer of my paper for suggesting a better translation of this stanza.

<sup>64</sup> “Templum Dei fuisti  
Et naturam contulisti  
Creatoris filio.” (“Hymnus 338. Ejusdem festi [De conceptione s. Mariae virg.] ad matutinas hymnus,” in F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 25).



Your Son in heaven  
 When you looked up to heaven  
 [and saw him] going up in divine form.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, Hymn 507 extols the Virgin with these lyrical compliments:

Hail, o heaven of Deity,  
 Paradise of joy,  
 Hall of Supreme Majesty,  
 Temple of the Holy Trinity,  
 Room of Christ.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, Hymn 510 reiterates similar praises when it says in two of its stanzas:

Hail, o chamber of chastity,  
 Gate of Paradise.  
 Hail, temple of Deity,  
 Hail, royal residence of the Sun.

Hail, o port for the shipwrecked,  
 Hail, stem of Jesse.  
 Hail, splendor of goodness,  
 Hail, full of grace.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> "Gaude, templum Jhesu Christi,  
 Plenum sancti Spiritus,  
 Digna tollere fuisti  
 miserorum gemitus,  
 Tu laudare meruisti  
 Tuum natum coelitus,  
 Cum ad coelos prospexisti  
 Scandentem divinitus." ("Hymnus 479. In honorem Virginis prosa," in F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 194).

<sup>66</sup> "Ave, coelum Deitatis,  
 Paradisus voluptatis,  
 Aula summae Majestatis,  
 Templum sanctae Trinitatis,  
 Christi habitaculum." ("Hymnus 507. Oratio, quae dicitur crinale beatæ Mariæ virginis." In F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 268).

<sup>67</sup> "Ave, cella castitatis,  
 Paradisi janua,

Finally, Hymn 587 repeats a comparable tribute by proclaiming:

Hail, holy temple  
 You set an example of virtue,  
 Mirror of purity.

You lily of chastity.  
 Violet of humility,  
 Bright flower of modesty.<sup>68</sup>

Before finishing this research, it suits to expose a disturbing observation due to the unforeseen. We must consider the large and multisecular corpus of testimonies that we have managed to register, through which numerous Church Fathers, medieval theologians, and hymnographers unanimously interpret the aforementioned metaphorical expressions with Mariological and/or Christological projection. That is why it is shocking that most of the modern treatises on Mariology and other relevant current doctrinal studies on the Virgin Mary do not even mention these eloquent metaphors or say anything about their dogmatic meanings, highlighted in this article.

One can see this surprising silence on the metaphors under scrutiny, for example, in authors of entries about Mary in classic encyclopaedias and dictionaries of Theology, such as E. Dublanchy (1927)<sup>69</sup> and the

---

Ave, templum Deitatis,  
 Ave, Solis regia.

Ave, portus naufragantis,  
 Ave Jesse virgula.  
 Ave splendor bonitatis,

Ave plena gratia." ("Hymnus 510. Ad b. Mariam v." In F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 284).

<sup>68</sup> "Salve, sacrum templum,  
 Tu virtutum fers exemplum,  
 speculum munditiae:

Lilium tu castitatis,  
 Viola humilitatis,

Flos candens pudicitiae." ("Hymnus 587. De b. Maria v.," in F. J. MONE, *Hymni Latini II*, 403).

<sup>69</sup> E. DUBLANCHY, "Marie," in H. LECLERCQ – F. CABROL, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, IX, 2e Partie (Létouzey et Ané, Paris 1927) col. 2.339-2.474.

various editors of the entry on the Virgin in the Vatican *Encyclopedia Cattolica* (1952).<sup>70</sup> A similar omission is observed in authors who write *dictionary entries* or chapters about Mary in more modern dictionaries of Theology or Mariology, such as J. Galot,<sup>71</sup> G. L. Müller,<sup>72</sup> S. de Fiores and E. Testa,<sup>73</sup> S. de Fiores and A. Serra,<sup>74</sup> S. de Fiores, and S. Meo,<sup>75</sup> and A. Serra, S. Meo, and D. Sartor.<sup>76</sup> You can find out an analogous obliteration on the Christological and Mariological meanings of these analyzed metaphorical expressions in classic authors of treatises on Mariology, such as J. A. de Aldama,<sup>77</sup> M. Ponce Cuéllar,<sup>78</sup> H. Rahner,<sup>79</sup> and even the most recent J. C. R. García Paredes.<sup>80</sup>

And yet, despite these omissions by contemporary theologians and Mariologists, the outstanding importance and the decisive Mariological and Christological projection that these analyzed metaphorical expressions contain, according to the multi-secular and unanimous tradition consolidated by numerous Fathers, medieval theologians, and hymnographers, as we have been able to demonstrate throughout this article.

---

<sup>70</sup> "Maria Santissima - Madre di Gesù Cristo, Figlio di Dio fattosi uomo," in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, VIII (Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico, Città del Vaticano 1948-1954) col. 76-118.

<sup>71</sup> J. GALOT, "Maria," in G. BARBAGLIO – S. DIENICH, *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología*, I (Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid 1982) 968-984.

<sup>72</sup> G. L. MÜLLER, "La madre de Cristo, modelo de la existencia cristiana y tipo de la Iglesia (Mariología)," in G. L. MÜLLER, *Dogmática. Teoría y práctica de la teología* (Herder, Barcelona 2016) 479-518.

<sup>73</sup> St. DE FIORES – E. TESTA, "María de Nazaret," in St. DE FIORES – S. MEO (dirs.), *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología* (San Pablo, Madrid 1988) 1.244-1.270.

<sup>74</sup> St. DE FIORES – A. SERRA, "Virgen," in St. DE FIORES – S. MEO, *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*, 1.977-2.039.

<sup>75</sup> St. DE FIORES – S. MEO, *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*.

<sup>76</sup> A. SERRA *et al.*, "Madre de Dios," in St. DE FIORES – S. MEO, *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*, 1.173-1.199.

<sup>77</sup> J. A. de ALDAMA, *María en la Patrística de los siglos I y II* (BAC, Madrid 1970) 2 vols.

<sup>78</sup> M. PONCE CUÉLLAR, *María, madre del Redentor y de la Iglesia* (Herder, Barcelona 2001).

<sup>79</sup> H. RAHNER, *María y la Iglesia* (Cristiandad, Madrid 2004).

<sup>80</sup> J. C. R. GARCÍA PAREDES, *Mariología* (BAC, Madrid 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS

For more than a millennium, from the early 4<sup>th</sup> century to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, many Latin Church Fathers and theologians suggested numerous interpretations of several metaphors, like “temple of God,” “sanctuary,” “tabernacle,” “ark,” and other analogous expressions concerning the spaces or containers reserved for the godhead.

The analysis of these exegetic comments reveals a substantial concordance because, except for slight variations, all these Latin thinkers interpret those metaphors as symbols of God the Son’s incarnation in Virgin Mary’s womb and also symbols of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood.

However, despite this essential agreement, almost all the Latin writers analyzed here orient their interpretations in a Mariological sense. Thus St. Gregory the Great, St. Isidore of Seville, St. Peter Damian, Geoffrey of Vendôme, Peter Abelard, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Honorius of Autun, Richard of Saint-Victor, Peter de Celle, and St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio agree to sustain that the metaphorical expressions above symbolize Mary, and more specifically, her virginal womb, in her privilege of being the Mother of God the Son incarnate.

Instead, St. Venantius Fortunatus, St. Ildefonsus of Toledo, and St. Anselm of Canterbury, even accepting this Mariological dimension, significantly integrate it with a Christological projection. Those three Christian thinkers, in fact, hold that the various metaphors we have discussed symbolize both Mary (whose virginal womb conceives and gives birth to God the Son incarnate) and the human nature or body of Christ, a body to which God the Son unifies his divine nature hypostatically, for becoming one person, with two real natures, divine and human.

Apart from these two exegetical orientations –in no way antithetical, but inherently related and complementary–, the various Latin authors analyzed here show complete agreement when interpreting the multiple metaphors under scrutiny. That observation undoubtedly reveals a strong influence of the most prestigious teachers on other lesser authors. This also shows that the writings of

the great Church Fathers and Doctors were read relentlessly and copied repeatedly *en masse* since they were considered the firm foundations of the compact doctrinal tradition developed and consolidated during more than one millennium within Christianity.