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Latin theological interpretations on *templum Dei* until the Second Council of Constantinople: A Mariological and Christological symbol

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Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight the various interpretations that, before the Second Council of Constantinople (May-June 553), many Latin Church Fathers gave on several metaphorical expressions, such as “God’s temple,” “sanctuary,” “tabernacle,” “ark,” and other similar terms referring to spaces or containers reserved for deity. To address this issue, the author of this article structures his methodology on three strategies: the first consists in a profound tracking in Patristic and theological sources to detect some relevant statements by conspicuous Christian masters on the subject; through the second, he analyzes intra-textually each found Patristic assertions to decipher the doctrinal interpretation that every Christian writer brings about such metaphors; by the third methodological strategy, he intertextually relates all these texts, and authors through a comparative analysis to highlight their possible concordances or discrepancies.

Key words: *Templum Dei*, Christ's incarnation, virginal divine motherhood, Virgin Mary, Latin Patristics.

Interpretaciones teológicas latinas sobre el ‘templum Dei’ hasta el Segundo Concilio de Constantinopla: un símbolo mariológico y cristológico

Resumen

Este artículo busca resaltar las diversas interpretaciones que, antes del Segundo Concilio de Constantinopla (mayo-junio de 553), muchos Padres de la Iglesia Latina dieron sobre varias expresiones metafóricas, como “templo de Dios”, “santuario”, “tabernáculo”, “arca”, y otros términos similares referidos a espacios o contenedores reservados a la divinidad. Para abordar este tema, el autor del presente artículo estructura su metodología en tres estrategias fundamentales: el primer paso consiste en un seguimiento sistemático y profundo en fuentes patrísticas y teológicas para detectar declaraciones relevantes de conspicuos maestros de la doctrina cristiana sobre el tema; a través del segundo procedimiento, analiza intra-textualmente cada una de las afirmaciones patrísticas encontradas para descifrar la interpretación doctrinal que cada escritor cristiano aporta sobre tales metáforas; mediante la tercera y conclusiva estrategia metodológica, el autor relaciona intertextualmente todos estos textos y pensadores a través de un análisis comparativo para resaltar sus posibles concordias o discrepancias.

Palabras clave: *Templum Dei*, encarnación de Cristo, virginal maternidad divina, Virgen María, Patrística Latina.

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INTRODUCTION

Systematic, in-depth research on the most important primary sources of Christian doctrine —biblical, patristical, theological, liturgical, mystical, etc.— has long given us a surprising finding. For more than twelve centuries, from at least the third century until at least the fifteenth century, many Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches agreed to use in dogmatic projection several expressions referring to spaces or containers reserved for deity, such as “temple,” “sanctuary,” “*Sancta Sanctorum*,” “tabernacle,” “ark,” and other similar terms. The surprise increased when discovering that all the Christian authors I have analyzed in such a thematic and historical context unanimously interpreted these expressions as poetic metaphors of God the Son's incarnation in Mary's virginal womb, according to three possible exegetical variants, scilicet: the strictly Mariological (the most commonly accepted), according to which these expressions symbolize Mary and, more specifically, her virginal womb; the strictly Christological (the second in preference), according to which such metaphors symbolize the human body or nature in which God the Son became incarnated; thirdly, and as a rare exception, the bivalent variant, simultaneously Mariological and Christological, according to which the words mentioned above symbolize both Mary and the human body of Christ.

In such a sense, the short echo that this vast and profound subject has had in the academic field is quite surprising. As far as I 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 a systematic and in-depth study by most specialists¹.

It is evident, in any case, that the systematic and 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 I know about the Virgin Mary, where only sporadically there is some isolated and unjustified allusion to it. One can find such silence on the subject analyzed here in typical Mariology treatises, such as those by Gregorio Alastruey (1952), Stefano de Fiores (1982: 984-1019), Bruno Forte (1993), José Cristo Rey García Paredes (1995), Domiciano Fernández (1999), Manfred Hauke (2015), or Gerhard Ludwig Müller (2016), and or in

¹ Of course, you can find from time to time some exceptional papers related to this particular issue, such, for example, di Girolamo (2003: 159-2299), and Calero (2012: 95-124).

monographs focused on the Virgin Mary, such as those by Hugo Rahner (1951), Ignace de la Potterie (1988), Miguel Ponce Cuéllar (2001), Antonio María Calero (2010), or Jesús Casás Otero (2015). Nor are analytical studies on the interpretation of *templum Dei* metaphor or other similar expressions according to the ancient and medieval exegetical tradition, in chapters or voices about Mary in some dictionaries or encyclopedias of a theological or Mariological nature, such as *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia. Vol. I. A. Testamento – Mariologia* (Barbaglio & Dianich, 2000) *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia* (de Fiores & Meo, 1985) *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* (di Berardino, 1983) 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* (Bourgeois, Sesboüé & Tihon, 1995).

Despite this oblivion and this lack of in-depth studies on it, a fact is undeniable: since at least the 4th century and for more than a millennium –up to at least the 15th century– one can document countless testimonies both in Eastern and Western Christendom that metaphorically consider the Virgin Mary as “temple of God,” “Sanctuary of Deity,” “tabernacle,” “Sancta Sanctorum,” “ark,” “urn,” “altar,” or other similar analogies alluding to spaces or containers reserved for God. Now, given the vast *corpus* of exegetical glosses that Greek-Eastern and Latin Christian thinkers produced on such symbolic figures all along those twelve centuries (4th-15th), I have divided the analysis of this specific subject into several different, although essentially interrelated, articles². The current paper focuses on analyzing only the comments made on such metaphors by the Latin Church Fathers before the Second Council of Constantinople (May-June 553).

1. EXEGESES BY LATIN CHURCH FATHERS ON *TEMPLUM DEI* BEFORE 553

Among the many testimonies found in this regard, I will present below a select representative sample of Latin Fathers' exegetical comments on the mentioned metaphorical expressions during the two and a half centuries under study.

In the mid-4th century, Saint Zeno, bishop of Verona (c. 300-371/372), points out in a treatise on the Nativity of Jesus that, when the time comes, God the Son, hiding his divine majesty and leaving his heavenly seat, settled in the temple of the predestined Virgin Mary; there the one who was going to be born as a man sneaks in, and, preserving what he was (his divine nature), meditates to be what he was not (a

² I have already made a generic approach to this subject in Salvador-González (2020b: 23-41; 2020c: 55-68; 2020d: 127-145; and 2021: 77-93).

man)³. The author points out that Christ pretended to be an infant after mixing his divine nature with human flesh because Mary's womb shone pregnant not by male semen but by faith and by God's Word itself⁴. Then Zeno explains the reason for considering the Virgin the “temple of God” when he proclaims with wonder: “Oh, great Sacrament! Mary has conceived as an incorrupt virgin. After conception, she gave birth as a virgin, and after childbirth, she remained a virgin. [...] Thus, Christ was born as a man in a way that no man can be born”⁵. So St. Zeno is the first Latin Father to align with the strictly Mariological interpretation of the topic under scrutiny.

A few years later, the influential theologian Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (c. 339/40-397), metaphorically interpreting two Old Testament citations in a famous treatise on virginity, sustains that, when the Word of God became flesh in Mary's womb, passed as King of Israel and as a prince through the closed door of her virginity and sat in the royal palace of her virginal womb, or a boiling pot⁶. Explaining these unusual comparisons with greater precision, he points out that both metaphors, the royal palace, and the boiling pot, prefigure the virginal womb of Mary, since “the royal palace is the Virgin [Mary], who is not subject to any man, but only to God, and the pot is the womb of Mary, who with the boiling of the Holy Spirit that came upon her filled the orb of the earth by giving birth to the Savior”⁷.

Insisting on similar concepts in a commentary on Luke's Gospel, St. Ambrose argues that whoever had received the incorrupt mystery of the incarnation did not judge more beneficial to obtain the testimony of

³ “Etenim Deus Dei Filius, tempore constituto, dissimulata interim majestate, ab aetherea sede profectus, in praedestinatae virginis templum sibimet castra metatur, quibus latenter infunditur in hominem gigniturus, ibidemque salvo quod erat meditatur esse, quod non erat.” (Zeno Veronensis, 1845: 413-415).

⁴ “Mistus itaque humanae carni se fingit infantem. Mariae superbus emicat venter, non munere conjugali, sed fide, Verbo, non semine.” (Zeno Veronensis, 1845: 413-415)

⁵ “O magnum Sacramentum! Maria virgo incorrupta concepit, post conceptum virgo peperit, post partum virgo permansit. [...] Ita Christus in hominem se fecit nasci, quemadmodum homo non potest nasci.” (Zeno Veronensis, 1845: 414-415).

⁶ “Ipse ergo Rex Israel transivit hanc portam, ipse dux sedit in ea; quando Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis (Joan. I,14), quasi Rex sedens in aula regali uteri virginalis, vel in olla ferventi, sicut scriptum est: Moab aula spei, vel olla spei meae (Ps. 59, 10).” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880a: 324).

⁷ “Utrumque enim diversis in codicibus invenitur. Aula regalis est virgo, quae non est viro subdita, sed Deo soli. Est et olla uterus Mariae, quae Spiritu ferventi qui supervenit in eam, replevit orbem terrarum, cum peperit Salvatorem.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880a: 324).

Mary's virginity⁸; and, when it was communicated to the just Joseph, it was stated that Joseph could not violate the Mother of God, who is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the womb of mystery⁹.

Furthermore, in his epistle 30, Ambrose asserts that Jesus Christ, wanting to find a temple in which to dwell (that means, to incarnate) for redeeming humankind, did not look for stones or woods worked with human hands but chose the womb of the Virgin Mary to turn it into the royal palace and the temple where the King of heaven lived¹⁰. Further expanding such thoughts, the author asks in his letter 63 how we could ponder how great was the grace of the virginity of Mary, who deserved to be chosen by Christ to be the bodily temple of God, in which the fullness of deity lived, remaining virgin at the same time by begetting the Savior of the world and giving birth to the Life of all people¹¹.

Finally, in his *Hymnus IV* St. Ambrose proclaims:

Not by manly semen,
But by a mystical breath,
The Word of God became flesh
And the fruit of [Mary's] womb bloomed.
The womb of the Virgin swells,
And the cloister of virginity [*claustrum pudoris*] remains:
The flags of virtues wave,
God dwells in the temple¹².

⁸ “Et ideo qui incarnationis incorruptum suscepit probare mysterium, non putavit uberius prosequendum virginitatis Mariae testimonium; ne defensor magis Virginis, quam assertor mysterii crederetur.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1887: 1555).

⁹ “Certe quando justum docuit Joseph, satis declaravit quod sancti Spiritus templum, uterum mysterii, matrem Domini violare non potuit.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1887: 1555).

¹⁰ “Neque enim terrenorum parietum constructiones, et silvestrium ligna culminum desiderabat, quae cum fuissent, manus dirueret hostilis; sed illud templum quaerebat, quod in hominum conderetur mentibus, quibus dicendum foret: Vos estis templum Dei (I Cor. 3, 10), in quo habitaret Dominus Jesus, et unde ad redemptionem universorum procederet, ut in utero Virginis sacra repperiretur aula, in qua Rex habitaret coelestium, et corpus humanum Dei templum fieret; quod etiam, cum solutum esset, in triduo resuscitaretur.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880b: 1062).

¹¹ “Quid autem loquar quanta sit virginitatis gratia, quae meruit a Christo elegi, ut esset etiam corporale Dei templum, in qua corporaliter, ut legimus (Coloss. II,9) habitavit plenitudo divinitatis? Virgo genuit mundi salutem, virgo peperit vitam universorum.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880c: 1249).

¹² “*Non ex virili semine,*
Sed mystico spiramine,
Verbum Dei factum est caro
Fructusque ventris floruit.
Alvus tumescit virginis,

And in another stanza of the same hymn, he asserts:

Coming from his bridal bedroom,
The royal palace of modesty,
The giant of two twin substances¹³,
[Comes out] speedy to run the road.¹⁴

These repeated quotes seem to clarify that St. Ambrose prefers to restrict the interpretation of the analyzed metaphors to the only Mariological projection, in the sense that *templum Dei*, *aula regalis*, or *claustrum pudoris* metaphorically mean only the virginal womb of Mary, not the human body of Jesus.

According to all these testimonies, St. Ambrose interprets the “temple of God” in a strictly Mariological sense by identifying this symbolic temple as the Virgin Mary, in whose womb God the Son lived at his conception and during his gestation.

Approximately a decade later, St. Gaudentius of Brescia († 410), by glossing in a sermon on Christ's Nativity the well-known sentence of the *Proverbs*, according to which “*Wisdom has built her house*,” states that God the Son, forming his human body (*hominem suum*) by the power of the Holy Spirit, making the living space of our body his own, put on this body and came out (he was born) without causing any damage to the virginal integrity of his mother; because the blessed Mary, in giving birth to the incorruptible Son of God incarnate, is mother and virgin at the same time.¹⁵ Therefore, it is clear that Gaudentius decides to restrict his interpretation of those metaphors to the only Christological projection, considering God's temple or the house of Wisdom as a symbol of the human body of God the Son incarnate.

Clastrum pudoris permanet,
Vexilla virtutum micant,
Versatur in templo Deus.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880c: 1474). In the subsequent notes of the current article all literal translations from Latin into English are due to the author of the paper.

¹³ With these two “twin substances” St. Ambrose refers to the two natures, divine and human, of Christ, inextricably united in one person, at the same time true God and true man.

¹⁴ “Procedens de thalamo suo
Pudoris aula regia,
Geminae Gigas substantiae,
Alacris ut currat viam.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, 1880c: 1474).

¹⁵ “Sancto videlicet Spiritu ipse formans hominem suum, siquidem sapientia aedificavit sibi domum (Prov. IX): habitaculum quippe corporis nostri jam suum, quo habitaculo indutus est; sine ullo damno integritatis maternae, egreditur. Nam beatissima Maria incorruptibilem pariens, et mater, et virgo est.” (Gaudentius Brixiae, 1845: 934).

Perhaps by the same years, Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411) maintains similar arguments in favor of the exclusively Christological interpretation, even though he underlines at the same time the virginity of Mary in conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. The author points out, in effect, that the one (God the Son) who was born of the Father in eternity has now been made by the Holy Spirit a temple in the secret of the Virgin's womb; and, just as in the sanctification (of Mary) by the Holy Spirit, no fragility should be seen, nor can we think in any way that there is corruption in the birth of the Virgin¹⁶. In Rufinus' opinion, this birth is totally new and very fair for the earthly world, as he who is in heaven the only-begotten Son of God the Father is consequently an only-begotten on earth and is born uniquely¹⁷.

Taking these considerations into account, Rufinus of Aquileia is, to our knowledge, the first Latin Church Father to interpret the *templum Dei* in a strictly Christological sense: in his opinion, the temple that God “fabricated” for himself is the body or human nature that God the Son assumed from Mary's virginal entrails by Holy Spirit's power to be able to “permanently” inhabit it, that is, to hypostatically unite it to his divine nature and thus constitute a single person with two different natures, divine and human, Christ, true God, and true man.

One or two decades later, the prestigious polygraph, cardinal, and Church Father St. Jerome of Stridon¹⁸ (c. 347-419) also assumes the two-sided interpretation defended by St. Ambrose. Thus, in some writings, he opts for Christological interpretation, as when he maintains that the body received by Christ from the uncorrupted Virgin Mary did not become for Him a corruption, but a sacred temple¹⁹; nonetheless, in other texts, he recovers the Mariological interpretation, as when in a treatise on Mary's perpetual virginity names her “the temple of God, [and] the seat of the Holy Spirit”²⁰.

¹⁶ “huic enim, quem dudum de Patre natum ineffabiliter didicisti, nunc a Spiritu Sancto templum fabricatum intra secreta uteri virginalis intellige: et sicut in sanctificatione Sancti Spiritus nulla sentienda est fragilitas, ita et in partu Virginis nulla intelligenda est corruptio.” (Rufinus Aquileiensis, 1878: 349).

¹⁷ “Novus enim huic saeculo datus est hic partus, nec immerito. Qui enim in coelis unicus Filius est, consequenter et in terra unicus est, et unice nascitur.” (Rufinus Aquileiensis, 1878: 349).

¹⁸ On the life and work of St. Jerome, see the voice written by Gribomont (1983: 1.583-1588).

¹⁹ “Nos autem scimus de incorrupta virgine corpus assumptum, non corruptionem Christi fuisse, sed templum.” (Hieronymus Stridonensis, 1884: 1136).

²⁰ “qui Annam prophetissam, magos, stellam, Herodem, angelos viderat; qui, inquam, miracula tanta cognoverat, Dei templum, Spiritus sancti sedem, Domini sui matrem audebat attingere?” (Hieronymus Stridonensis, 1887: 290).

Perhaps by the same dates, St. Maximus of Turin († c. 420) proclaims Mary, in his fifth sermon on the Nativity of Christ, as a worthy abode for Jesus, not according to the laws of physical nature, but by the original grace of the Holy Spirit²¹. Some lines later, he asserts that the Virgin mysteriously gestated in her womb as in the tabernacle the priest, Christ God, priest and host, God of the resurrection, and priest of the oblation.²² The bishop of Turin states that we acknowledge that Christ is God, who returned to the Father, the pontiff who offered himself in sacrifice, a victim who was killed by us²³. Straight away, St. Maximus upholds that he prefers to call Mary's womb a temple, instead of a belly since it is the temple in which all holiness existing in heaven inhabits, a more valuable temple even than heaven, almost as if the divine mystery be installed in the most secret tabernacle²⁴.

So, according to Maximus, Mary's womb must be considered superior to heaven, for she returned God the Son to heaven in a much more glorious way than he had when descending from heaven to earth; as he came from there to suffer, and returned from here to reign; from there he went down humbled among human beings, and from here he went up glorified to the Father. Therefore —the holy prelate concludes—, the temple of Mary's body is much better than heaven's temple²⁵. It follows that Maximus of Turin assumes the narrowly Mariological interpretation of these symbolic figures. However, he reinforces the idea that the metaphors *sacrarium* and *templum Dei* signify Mary's womb because it housed and served as a room for the divine Priest Jesus.

In another sermon, St. Maximus of Turin begins by emphasizing that God had intended to spiritually associate Mary with the marital bed

²¹ “Idoneum plane Maria Christo habitaculum, non pro habitu corporis, sed pro gratia originali.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862a: 235).

²² “Maria enim tanquam in sacrario ventris sui portavit cum mysterio sacerdotem; nam quidquid in saeculo profuturum erat, id totum de ejus ventre: Deus, sacerdos et hostia; Deus resurrectionis, sacerdos oblationis.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862a: 236).

²³ “Hoc autem totum in Christo agnoscimus. Deus enim est, quod ad Patrem redit: pontifex, quod se obtulit: victima, quod pro nobis occisus est.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862a: 236).

²⁴ “Mariae ergo uterum non uterum dixerim fuisse, sed templum; templum plane est, in quo habitat sanctum quidquid in coelo est: nisi quod super coelos aestimandum est, ubi quasi in secretiore tabernaculo mysterium a divinitate disponitur, quemadmodum a pluribus ascendatur ad coelum.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862a: 236).

²⁵ “Super coelos plane aestimandus est uterus Mariae, quia Filium Dei gloriosorem remisit ad coelum, quam de coelo descenderat. Inde enim ut pateretur, hinc reversus est, ut regnaret: inde humiliatus descendit in hominem, hinc glorificatus ad Patrem ascendit. Melius plane templum corporis est, quam coeli.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862a: 236).

of Christ through her womb²⁶, according to the verse of Psalm 18, stating that Christ came out of his marital bed as a husband²⁷. Soon after, he says that we consider Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant, similar to the old covenant's ark before which King David jumped²⁸. Then the bishop of Turin contrasts the characteristics of both arks —David's old one and the new, which is the Virgin Mary— through these symbolic parallels/oppositions:

Indeed, the ark [of the old covenant] carried within the [Old] Testament tablets, but Mary gestated the heir of the same Testament. That [old ark] had within it the [mosaic] Law, this [new ark=Mary] contained the Gospel. That one had the voice of God; this had the true divine Word; nevertheless, that [old] ark radiated inside and outside with the shine of gold, but also Saint Mary shone inside and out with the splendor of virginity. The first was adorned with earthly gold, and the second one with a heavenly one.²⁹

A few years later, St. Augustine of Hippo³⁰ (354-430) joins the strictly Mariological interpretation. Thus, in a sermon on the birth of Christ, he begins rhetorically addressing the Virgin, asking her to rejoice because God the Son, King of Heaven, had deigned to descend from the womb of his divine Father to enter the womb of his Mother Mary; nevertheless, the divine majesty did not leave his celestial region, nor did the virginal palace enclose him, upon receiving him³¹. The author says that Faith was lifted from earth to heaven: Christ seated in it, and

²⁶ I have studied the Mariological and Christological metaphor “*thalamus Dei*” in Salvador-González (2020a: 7-31; 2021: 77-93).

²⁷ “Praevidebat enim in spiritu Mariam de germine suo Christi thalamo sociandam. Unde ait: “Et ipse tanquam sponsus de thalamo suo (Psal. XVIII)”. (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862b: 738-740).

²⁸ “Ergo saltavit propheta David ante arcam. Arcam autem quid nisi sanctam Mariam dixerimus?” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862b: 738-740).

²⁹ “Siquidem arca intrinsecus portabat testamenti tabulas, Maria autem ipsius testamenti gestabat heredem. Illa intra semet legem, haec Evangelium retinebat. Illa Dei vocem habebat; haec Verbum verum; tamen arca intus forisque auri nitore radiabat; sed et S. Maria intus forisque virginitalis splendore fulgebat. Illa terreno ornabatur auro, ista coelesti.” (Maximus Taurinensis, 1862b: 738-740).

³⁰ On the life and work of St. Augustine, see the large synthesis written by Frapé (1983: 1-103)

³¹ “Gratulare, Virgo, Christus rex e coelo suo venit in uterum tuum. Ex sinu Patris in uterum dignatus est descendere Genitricis : sed nec regionem suam majestas infinita deseruit, nec eum virginalis aula cum accepisset, inclusit.” (Augustinus Hipponensis, 1865: 1985).

through it entered the temple of modesty (in Mary's virginal womb)³².

In another sermon on the same salvific event, Augustine expresses:

The mediating angel [Gabriel] arrived at the home of purity [Mary] to get a palace (*aula*) for the king, a temple for God, and a marital bedroom for the heavenly husband. So, when the Lord was born, the virginity [of Mary] was not destroyed, but was consecrated; she begat the husband of her modesty, providing herself a faithful service to her custodian; she is fruitful, but virgin; virgin, but mother; as she lacked sterility, but not virginity.³³

Saint Augustine, inspired by the well-known sentence from *Proverbs* “*Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum*,” states in his famous book *De Civitate Dei* that we recognize that God's Wisdom, which is just the divine Word, coeternal with the Father, built in the virginal womb of Mary his house, that is, a human body, and united the Church to it as the members to the head³⁴.

Almost one generation later, St. Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-c. 450/51), bishop of Ravenna, known as “the Doctor of the Homilies,” is—as far as I know—the first Latin writer to take up decidedly the double interpretation, Mariological and Christological, on the metaphors under analysis: so he integrates with a full agreement the two versions that the different authors examined so far had been defending separately. Chrysologus maintains that *templum Dei* and the aforementioned metaphorical expressions symbolize Mary's virginal womb and Christ's human body. In some passages, this author seems to restrict to the Mariological projection. So, when interpreting in his sermon 59 on the Creed the sentence *Qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto et Maria Virgine*, he wonders what can be born merely earthly when he is called a virgin in childbirth by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and who does not believe to be divine he

³² “Fides a terra in coelum erecta est: huic Christus insedit, et per ipsam in templum pudoris intravit.” (Augustinus Hipponensis, 1865: 1985).

³³ “Ad domicilium castitatis angelus mediator advenit; ut regi aulam, Deo templum, et coelesti sponso thalamum procuraret. Nascente enim Domino non est ablata, sed consecrata virginitas; quae ipsa sponsum genuit sui pudoris, ipsa custodi praebebat fidele servitium: feta, sed virgo; virgo, sed mater; sterilitate enim caruit, non pudore.” (Augustinus Hipponensis, 1865: 1992).

³⁴ “Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum (Prov. 9,1)’... Hic certe agnoscimus Dei Sapientiam, hoc est, Verbum Patro coeternum, in utero virginali domum sibi aedificasse corpus humanum, et hunc tamquam capiti membra Ecclesiam subiunxisse.” (Augustinus Hipponensis, 1974: 325).

whose mother feels nothing human when giving birth to him³⁵. That is because —the holy bishop explains—a woman (Mary) gestated God in her womb as in a virginal temple, which means that she acquired the honor of being a mother without losing the glory of virginity.³⁶ With this statement, the Chrysologus stands among the defenders of the Mariological thesis, reinforcing the idea that Mary can be considered a true “temple of God,” thanks to her virginal divine motherhood, being the mother of God while remaining a virgin.

Peter Chrysologus contributes a similar interpretation in his sermon 103: there he urges the believers that, at the arrival of Christ's birth —when the virginity that will give birth already radiates a celestial miracle—, everyone comes to worship and offer gifts to God, from which they must confess that he comes from a virginal temple (Mary's womb)³⁷. The bishop of Ravenna points in the same Mariological direction when arguing in his sermon 144 that the Virgin Mary found within her (in her womb) the divine Word that existed from the beginning with God; so she, who was a tiny shelter of humanity, became the great temple of deity, to the point that the smallness of the human body began to come true in all its greatness in Mary's virginal womb for this infinite being that does not fit anywhere³⁸.

However, Peter Chrysologus also adopts the Christological exegetic variant, according to which *templum Dei* designates the human body of Christ. Thus, in his sermon 141 on God the Son's incarnation, he rhetorically asks people if, with their significant limitations, they can boldly try to understand with human eyes and bodily senses the unfathomable mystery of Jesus Christ's virginal conception³⁹; and if they

³⁵ “Qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto et Maria Virgine. Quid terrenum nascitur, ubi auctore Spiritu virgo vocatur in partu? quis non divinum credat quando quae peperit nil sensit humanum?” (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894a: 364).

³⁶ “Deum mulier virgineo portabat in templo: hinc est quod et adquisivit honorem matris, et virginitatis gloriam non amisit.” (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894a: 364).

³⁷ “Quia nascentis Christi venit tempus, et miraculum caeleste iam radiat paritura virginitas, atque ortum divini regis nobis non stella iam nuntiat, sed ipse solis ascensus, adoraturi occurramus omnes, et muneribus sacris Deum regemque virgineo processisse fateamur ex templo.” (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894b: 489).

³⁸ “Quod erat in principio apud Deum, Verbum Deum intra se virgo reperit, et factum est magnum deitatis templum, quae erat pusillum humanitatis hospitium, et quem non capiebat pusillitas humani corporis, coepit virginalis uteri magnitudo.” (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894c: 586).

³⁹ “Unde, o homo, his admonitus exemplis, aestima quis sis, quantus sis, qualis sis, et tum demum cogita utrum possis Dominicae nativitatis penetrare secretum, utrum merearis ad illius pectoris cubiculum pervenire, ubi tota superni Regis, tota divinitatis requiescit majestas; utrum debeas humanis oculis, corporeis sensibus, conceptum virginis temerarius discussor attendere.” (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894d: 578).

can as curious and bold arbiters intuit how the same hands of God could operate to create for himself the temple of his own body within the Virgin Mary, so revealing the hidden mystery for centuries and the sacrament invisible even for the angels⁴⁰. From what I have explained, one can conclude that Peter Chrysologus defends the two exegetical variants, Mariological and Christological, although like independent proposals, without integrating them into a unitary interpretation with bivalent validity. For these reasons, St. Peter Chrysologus manifests himself as the first Latin Church Father to defend at the same time the two variations, Mariological and Christological, of the *templum Dei* metaphor.

Perhaps for the same decades, the conspicuous apologist, Church Doctor, and Pope St. Leo the Great⁴¹ (c. 390-461) address this issue in his sermon 28 on the Nativity of Christ. In this writing, he invites us to think that, when celebrating the day of Jesus' birth, I think of Mary's miraculous birth, to believe that at no time the power of the divine Word ceased to act in the human body and soul that had been conceived in Virgin's womb; he also invites us not to think that the temple of Christ's body was formed and animated first, which would then be followed by its inhabitant (the Word), but that a new man began to exist by itself and in itself, as the simultaneous only-begotten of God and man, having divine nature with no mother and human nature with no father (Joseph)⁴². According to the author, the virginity fertilized by the Holy Spirit gave birth simultaneously, without any corruption, to a descendant of the same human race and the author (God) of his lineage⁴³. Thus Leo the Great prefers the strictly Christological interpretation by reserving the biblical expression "temple of God" as the exclusive symbol of Christ's human body.

By the middle of the fifth century, Arnobius Junior resumes the Mariological variant. After commenting on the sentence of Psalm 14 according to which the only one who enters spotless and works with

⁴⁰ "utrum possis ipsas Dei manus operantes sanctum sibi corporis templum intra alvum geneticis audax et curiosus arbiter intueri, conspectibus tuis absconditum saeculis nudare mysterium, revelare tibi ipsis angelis invisibile sacramentum." (Petrus Chrysologus, 1894d: 578).

⁴¹ On St. Leo the Great, see Studer (1983: 1.022-1.026).

⁴² "Celebrantes igitur, dilectissimi, natalem diem Domini Salvatoris, partum beatae Virginis integre cogitemus, ut carni animaeque conceptae virtutem Verbi nullo temporis puncto defuisse credamus, nec prius formatum atque animatum templum corporis Christi, quod sibi superveniens vindicaret habitator, sed per ipsum et in ipso, novo homini datum esse principium: ut in uno Dei atque hominis filio, et sine matre Deitas, et sine patre esset humanitas." (Leo Magnus, 1846: 222).

⁴³ "Simul enim per Spiritum sanctum fecundata virginitas, sine corruptionis vestigio edidit et sui generis sobolem, et suae stirpis auctorem." (Leo Magnus, 1846: 222).

justice will dwell in Lord's tabernacle, Arnobius infers that only the immaculate Jesus entered Mary's virginal palace, delivered her from every fleshly stain as a holy tabernacle, and gave her the sanctification, instead of receiving it from her⁴⁴.

More or less by the same decades, Coelius Sedulius composed — based on the traditional Mariological interpretation of the metaphors in question— a famous hymn in honor of Mary, in one of whose stanzas he expresses:

The house of the modest chest
Suddenly became the temple of God:
Maintaining her virginal integrity without knowing male
She fathered a son with the Word.⁴⁵

In that same fifth century, Pseudo-Origen (perhaps the deacon Paulo Winfrido)⁴⁶ also endorses the Mariological exegetical variant. In fact, in a sermon for the liturgical time, this cryptic writer rhetorically urges St. Joseph to accept without suspicion his already pregnant wife Mary “as the mansion of the Divine Only-Begotten, as the honorable temple, as the house of God, as the house of the Creator of the universe, as the immaculate house of the husband and heavenly king”⁴⁷.

Towards the end of the fifth century or the beginning of the sixth, a particular anonymous author, known as Pseudo-Augustine, also joins the exclusively Mariological interpretation of the symbolic metaphors under analysis. Thus, in a sermon on the Nativity of Jesus, he requests the Christians to acclaim Mary with joyful praises as “Church of God, the temple of Christ, house of the Holy Spirit”⁴⁸. Then he invites them to

⁴⁴ “Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo, aut quis requiescet in monte sancto tuo? Qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur iustitiam (Ps. 14, 1-2) [...] Omnis immaculatus ingreditur tabernaculum Domini, et ibi immaculatus efficitur. Jesus autem immaculatus solus virgineam aulam ingressus, ipsam tabernaculum a maculis carnalibus liberavit, et dedit sanctificationem potius quam accepit.” (Arnobius Junior, 1847: 340-341).

⁴⁵ “Domus pudici pectoris
templum repente fit Dei:
intacta nesciens virum
verbo creavit filium.” (Caelius Sedulius, 1846: 763-764).

⁴⁶ Jacques-Paul Migne identifies the Pseudo-Origen with Paulus Winfridus Diaconus.

⁴⁷ “Accipe eam sicut Unigeniti mansionem, sicut honorabile templum, sicut domum Dei, sicut Creatoris omnium [domum] propriam, sicut regis sponsi coelestis domum immaculatam.” (Pseudo-Origen, 1851: 1165).

⁴⁸ “Exurge ergo in laudes Domini, christiane; laetus exurge. Ecclesiam Dei, templum Christi, domum Spiritus Sancti sonoris imple praeconiis.” (Pseudo-Augustinus, 1981: 262)

enter the stable of the Creator (in Bethlehem), to frequent the manger of the Savior, and to kiss the diapers of the eternal Shepherd⁴⁹. Furthermore, he stimulates them to compose praises in honor of the Virgin Mary, a true mother who, without withering by childbirth, remains beautiful for the integrity of her virginity⁵⁰.

In second writing about the same feast, Pseudo-Augustine says, in an imaginary dialogue with Mary, that she will not give birth like the other women, because she will beget a child without losing her virginity: that is possible for she has deserved to gestate the divinity, as promised by the angel Gabriel “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with his shadow”⁵¹. According to this unknown writer, the womb of Mary became a palace of the Holy Spirit, and, after paying close attention to the divine covenant brought by the angel, she deserved instantly to have God as a guest in the room of her womb⁵².

Faced with this Mariological exegetic variant signed by the four preceding authors, St. Just of Urgell enlists in the middle of the sixth century on the side of the defenders of the exclusively Christological exegetic position, according to which the symbolic figures under scrutiny symbolize the human body of Jesus. Indeed, the bishop of Urgell glosses the quote of the apostle John “And my prayer will come to your holy temple” in the sense that the right temple of the Lord must be interpreted as that human body to which the fullness of God joined in Mary's virginal womb and helped humankind by redeeming it⁵³.

It is necessary to emphasize that all these Mariological and Christological interpretations of the Church Fathers emerged and consolidated as the orthodox doctrine in the historical context of the intense debates

⁴⁹ “Intra in stabulum Creatoris, frequenta praeseptum Salvatoris et aeterni Pastoris deosculare pannos. Cunas amplectere.” (Pseudo-Augustinus, 1981: 262).

⁵⁰ “Veni, compone mecum laudes ad fetam nostram, Virginem sanctam, matrem veram, non ex partu marcidam, sed de pudoris integritate formosam.” (Pseudo-Augustinus, 1981: 262).

⁵¹ “Non ita, Maria; non sic paries quomodo ceterae feminae. Tu ita filium generabis, ut nunquam amittas castitatem, quae ipsam portare mereberis deitatem. ‘Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi (Lc. 1, 35).’” (Pseudo-Augustinus, 1981: 269).

⁵² “Quia venter tuus palatium factus est Spiritus Sancti. Et illa, ubi coeleste audivit pactum, nuntio praebebat auditum, et meruit illico intra cameram ventris habere hospitem Deum.” (Pseudo-Augustinus, 1981: 269).

⁵³ “‘Et veniet oratio mea ad templum sanctum tuum (Ion. 2, 8)’ [...] Melius ille solus intellegendus est Domini fuisse veridicum templum quem divina sibi plenitudo in uterum virginalem coniunxit et humano generi redimendo succurrit.” (Justus Urgellensis, 1981: 352).

that arose within Christianity during the 3rd and 4th centuries regarding the nature and hypostatic condition of Christ. Among the various heretical currents, Arius and the Arians affirmed that the Son of God was not eternal but was created by God the Father before creating the world. Furthermore, they declared that Christ was not God, but only an exceptional man, animated by the Word of God. In turn, Eutychius and the Eutychians denied the human nature of Christ since, according to them, he only had the divine nature (monophysitism). On the other hand, Nestorius and the Nestorians denied the divine nature of Jesus, considering him only man, which meant denying the Virgin Mary her condition as Mother of God (*Theotokos*), considering her only mother of Christ the man (*Christotokos*).

Faced with all these heresies, the Church Fathers had to formulate and consolidate the orthodox Christology, that is to say: Christ has two natures, the divine, as true God, and the human, as true man, substantially united in one single person (hypostatic union). Such an orthodox Christology implies, as a necessary correlative, the consolidation of the orthodox Mariology, whose primordial thesis is the virginal divine motherhood of Mary, apodictically declared the true Mother of God (*Theotokos*), for having supernaturally conceived and given birth to Jesus, true God, and true man. All these exegetical positions of the Church Fathers formed an orthodox dogmatic tradition that concretized, against the various heresies, in three doctrinally very relevant Councils: the Council of Ephesus, which in 431 defined the true personal unity of Christ and declared that Mary was the true Mother of God (*Theotokos*); the Council of Chalcedon, which twenty years later (451) defined Jesus' two natures, divine, and human, united in one person; and the Second Council of Constantinople (553), which, among other decisions, ratified Christ as a unique person with two natures, divine and human.

CONCLUSIONS

During the two and a half centuries that I have considered in this paper (4th-5th centuries and the first half of the 6th), many Latin Church Fathers commented with dogmatic projection some terms or expressions of the Old Testament, such as "temple of God," "house of Wisdom," "abode of the Most High," "Sancta Sanctorum," "sanctuary," "ark," "tabernacle," and other similar terms alluding to spaces or containers reserved for divinity.

When comparatively analyzing these exegetical glosses, one confirms a core concordance in them, since all those Latin Fathers essentially interpret these metaphorical expressions as symbols of God the Son's in-

carnation in Virgin's womb, and, consequently, as correlative symbols of Mary's virginal divine motherhood.

Now, within this substantial exegetical coincidence, three interpretative variants coexist, which, although at first glance seem divergent, are in the end closely interrelated and entirely complementary: one exclusively Mariological, another strictly Christological, and a third bivalent, simultaneously Mariological and Christological.

According to the purely Mariological exegetical variant, the mentioned biblical expressions symbolize Mary in her condition as the chosen Mother of God the Son incarnated. This first variant is the thesis advocated by Saint Zeno of Verona, Saint Ambrose of Milan, St. Maximus of Turin, St. Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Origen, and Pseudo-Augustine.

According to the strictly Christological interpretative mode, such metaphors symbolize the human body or nature to which God the Son hypostatically united his divine nature when incarnating. St. Gaudentius of Brescia, Rufinus of Aquileia, St. Leo the Great, and St. Just of Urgell support this second modality.

According to the bivalent exegetical variant, Mariological and Christological, the metaphorical expressions analyzed symbolize both Mary, who begot Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, in her virginal womb, as well as the human body of Christ, which God the Son took from Mary's virginal womb. St. Jerome and St. Peter Chrysologus hold this third dual-modality.

All the Christological and Mariological interpretations given by the Church Fathers in those two and a half centuries under study constitute the decisive arguments with which the orthodox Christianity has to combat the various heresies arisen by then. Faced with the Arian, Eutychian, and Nestorian heretics, who denied the divine or human nature of Christ, or the essential unity of both natures, divine, and human, in a single person, the Fathers defended the orthodoxy with solid arguments. The Christological and Mariological interpretations of the *templum Dei* and other similar metaphorical expressions already mentioned played a crucial role in these arguments.

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