

# Greek Fathers' interpretations of *templum Dei* as a double theological metaphor (3rd-9th centuries)

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<http://doi.org/10.33209/2519-4348-2707-9627-2020-8-77>

*The current article<sup>1</sup> aims to highlight the symptomatic interpretations that, from the 3rd to the 9th century, many Greek-Eastern Fathers brought on some metaphorical expressions, such as (*templum Dei*), "sanctuary," "tabernacle" (*tabernaculum*), "abode of the Deity" (*domicilium Deitatis*), and other similar terms referring to spaces or containers reserved exclusively for God. It should be pointed out that such metaphorical expressions come from different passages of the Old Testament, which were subsequently interpreted by the Fathers and theologians according to meanings consistent with the new faith founded by Christ. To carry out this research, the author of this paper proceeds following three methodological steps: first of all, finding –through in-depth, accurate analysis on Greek-Eastern primary sources— some eloquent passages by many relevant masters of Christian doctrine on that issue; second, analyzing intratextual each passage to discover the doctrinal interpretation offered by each Greek-Eastern Christian writer about those metaphors; third, contrasting all these texts and authors intertextually through a comparative analysis to highlight their possible concordances or discrepancies. The study of the exegetic comments produced during those seven centuries by numerous Fathers of the Greek-Eastern Church allows discovering three interpretative variants: one strictly Mariological, another one exclusively Christological, and a third bivalent, simultaneously Mariological and Christological. It is also important to stress that this unanimity of interpretative criteria on metaphorical expressions above by the Greek-Eastern Fathers and theologians agrees with the similar exegetical coincidence of the Latin Fathers and theologians on the same metaphors, as we have explained in another article.*

**Keywords:** *Templum Dei; Christ's incarnation; virginal divine motherhood; Virgin Mary; Mariology; Christology; Greek-Eastern Patrology.*

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a part of the set of activities of my CAPIRE Research Group (Collective for Multidisciplinary Analysis of European Religious Iconography), attached to the Complutense University of Madrid.

## 1. Introduction

Systematic research in primary sources of Christian doctrine allowed us to discover that for more than a millennium, since at least the 3rd century until at least the 15th century, many Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches agreed to comment with dogmatic projection some terms such as “*temple of God*,” “*sanctuary*,” “*Sancta Sanctorum*,” “*tabernacle*,” “*ark*,” and other expressions referring to a temple or religious construction reserved for God. Now, the immense corpus of exegetic glosses that the Eastern and Western Christian writers produced on such symbolic figures all along those thirteen centuries forced us to divide the analysis of this theme into two independent, although complementary and interconnected, articles. In the current paper, we will analyze the comments of the Greek-Eastern Fathers on the aforementioned metaphorical figures; in another article, we deal with a considerable amount of similar glosses made on these metaphors by some Latin Fathers and theologians<sup>2</sup>.

Given this immense amount of exegetical remarks by Latin and Greek-Eastern Fathers and medieval theologians, one is surprised by the little attention –not to mention the almost absolute silence— that modern experts have given to this crucial issue of the doctrinal interpretations of *templum Dei* and other similar metaphorical expressions mentioned above. It is more than explainable that José Antonio de Aldama says nothing about it since his important study about the commentaries of the Church Fathers on the Virgin Mary only covers the first and second centuries<sup>3</sup>, a period that precedes the one we have considered in this article. It is, however, surprising the fact that this abundant exegetic tradition of Fathers and theologians about the metaphors under analysis is absent from most of the Marian studies we know. One can see that silence on the subject mentioned above in treatises of Mariology like, for example, those written by Gerhard L. Müller<sup>4</sup>, and J. C. R. García Paredes<sup>5</sup>, or in monographs about Mary, such as those

<sup>2</sup> See J. M. Salvador-González, “*Latin theological interpretations on templum Dei: A double Christological and Mariological symbol (6th-15th centuries)*” (article under evaluation in an academic journal). With a global approach –including comments from Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin churches— and concerning the illustration of these metaphors in medieval art, we have also written the article 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* 1 (2020) (in press).

<sup>3</sup> J. A. de Aldama, *María en la Patrística de los siglos I y II* (Madrid, La Editorial Católica, 1970), 2 vols.

<sup>4</sup> G. L. Müller, *Dogmática. Teoría y práctica de la teología* (Barcelona, Herder, 1998). It is especially important the Chapter 8: “La madre de Cristo, modelo de la existencia cristiana y tipo de la Iglesia (Mariología),” 479-518.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. R. García Paredes, *Mariología* (Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2015).

produced by Hugo Rahner<sup>6</sup> or Miguel Ponce Cuéllar<sup>7</sup>. Nor are interpretive analyzes usually found on the metaphorical expressions under scrutiny, in chapters or voices about the Virgin Mary in most theological or Mariological dictionaries or encyclopedias, such as, for instance, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique et de Liturgie*<sup>8</sup>, *Enciclopedia Cattolica*<sup>9</sup>, *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología*<sup>10</sup>, *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*<sup>11</sup>, *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*<sup>12</sup>, or *Historia de los dogmas. Tomo III: Los signos de la salvación*<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, facing such overwhelming as inexplicable silence by modern specialists, it looks reasonable our purpose of bringing to light a part of the significant dogmatic richness contained in this specific subject. In that order of ideas, this article will seek to explain in chronological sequence the interpretations given by the medieval Greek-Eastern Fathers and theologians about the aforementioned metaphorical expressions.

## 2. Analyzing some comments of Greek-Eastern Fathers on *templum Dei* or similar metaphors

In the first half of the 3rd century, Origen (c. 185-c. 254) states in his sixth homily about the Exodus that the phrase of Proverbs "*Wisdom has built his house*"

<sup>6</sup> H. Rahner, *María y la Iglesia* (Madrid, Editorial Cristiandad, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> M. Ponce Cuéllar, *María, madre del Redentor y de la Iglesia* (Barcelona, Herder, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> E. Dublanchy, "Marie", in: F. Cabrol – H. Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique et de Liturgie* (Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1927), Tome 9, 2e Partie, col. 2339-2474.

<sup>9</sup> VV.AA. "Maria Santissima - Madre di Gesù Cristo, Figlio di Dio fattosi uomo", in VVVV, *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Città del Vaticano, Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica e per il Libro Cattolico, 1952), vol. VIII, col. 76-118.

<sup>10</sup> G. Barbaglio – S. Dianich (dirs.), *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología*, vol. I. A. Testamento – Mariología (Madrid, Editorial Cristiandad, 1982). See in this dictionary the voice of J. Galot, "Maria", vol. I, 968-984.

<sup>11</sup> de Fiores, S. & Meo. S. (dirs.), *Nuevo Diccionario de Mariología*, (Madrid, San Pablo Ediciones, 1988). It suits to see in this book the voices written by A. Serra, S. Meo & D. Sartor, "Madre de Dios", 1.173-1.199; S. de Fiores & E. Testa, "María de Nazaret", 1.244-1.270; and S. de Fiores & A. Serra, "Virgen", 1.977-2.039.

<sup>12</sup> A. di Berardino (dir.), *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* (Casale Monferrato, Marietti, 1983), 2 vols. See the voice of G. I. Söll, "Maria. I. Maria, madre di Gesù", vol II, 2.104-2.111.

<sup>13</sup> H. Bourgeois, B. Sesboué & P. Tihon (dirs.), *Historia de los dogmas. Tomo III: Los signos de la salvación* (Salamanca, Secretariado Trinitario, 1995). One can take into account the text of B. Sesboué, "Tercera Parte. La Virgen María", 425-470.

should be understood as a metaphor for God the Son's incarnation<sup>14</sup>. In his opinion, the temple of the flesh of Jesus was built in Mary without human intervention, as Daniel prophesied by indicating that a stone not cut by human hand became a high mountain, which is another symbolic figure of Christ's incarnation without human interference<sup>15</sup>.

In another sermon, Origen points out that, as, after Savior's incarnation, "*the truth was born from the earth and justice looked from heaven*," the shadows and imitations were eliminated; that is why Jerusalem and its temple fell, and neither Mount Gerizim nor Jerusalem were already convenient places to worship God, but the true worshippers of the Father must worship him in spirit and truth<sup>16</sup>. The author then contrasts the material temple of Jerusalem with the spiritual temple, which is Christ. So, Origen asserts that with the current truth brought by Jesus, imitation and shadow were finished, and, now being present this temple (God the Son incarnate) which was built in Mary's womb through the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Most High, the temple of Jerusalem, made of stones by men, collapsed (ceased to be valid)<sup>17</sup>.

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

In the 4th century, Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/264-c. 339/340) retakes this Christological variant, when interpreting the biblical verse "*[God] has set his tabernacle in the Sun*," meaning that he laid his seat and tabernacle on the body he took from the Virgin Mary, who was like the tabernacle of the divine power residing in it<sup>18</sup>.

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

<sup>14</sup> *Origenes*, In Exodum Homilia VI. PG 12, 340. Most Greek-Eastern texts analyzed in the current paper have been taken from J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (Paris, Garnier, 1857-1867), 166 vols. This collection of Greek patristics will be quoted in the subsequent footnotes with the abbreviation PG.

<sup>15</sup> *Origenes*, In Exodum Homilia VI. PG 12, 340.

<sup>16</sup> *Origenes*, *Homiliae in Librum Iesu Nave*. Homilia XVII, 1. PG 12, 909-910.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Eusebius Caesariensis*, *Eclogae propheticae*. Liber II, 10. PG 22, 1105.

*the Sancta Sanctorum for you, oh [heavenly] Priest.*"<sup>19</sup> And in another suggestive song, Ephrem says that Mary is the pure temple, in which God stayed, the eternal hero, in whom the mystery that God became man was admirably fulfilled<sup>20</sup>.

About twenty years later Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390) writes down in a poem that it is often said that from the Virgin's womb God became man, to whom the Holy Spirit joined when building the holy temple (Christ's body) in the temple of Christ, that is Mary<sup>21</sup>. A few verses later, he adds that, after the Virgin conceived Him in her womb filled by the deity, the divine Word gestated in her womb put on himself a solid flesh and filled the temple (his human body) with the pure divinity, thus possessing both natures, human and divine, and conserving himself as one God<sup>22</sup>. From the above, one can infer that Gregory of Nazianzus inaugurates among the Greek-Eastern writers the bivalent interpretative version, which identifies the *templum Dei* simultaneously with the body of Christ and with the virginal womb of Mary.

Towards the end of the 4th century, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330/35-c. 394/400) also adopts this bivalent interpretation. In a letter about the resurrection of Christ, he affirms that when the Holy Spirit came to Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her to beget the new man, Christ, this happened so that she would be the domicile of God, a home not made by human hand<sup>23</sup>. And, since the Most High does not dwell in buildings built by man, then divine Wisdom, building his house (his human body), entered this building already constituted under the symbolic figure of the overshadowing it, so that the divine nature of God the Son was united and mixed equally with the two parts (body and soul) of human nature<sup>24</sup>.

Some years later, Severian of Gabala (ante 380-post 408) seems to opt for the bivalent interpretation. In a sermon for Christmas he points out that God, just as for creating Eve he took a rib from Adam, who remained healthy and intact after that, so also created (to incarnate as a man) a temple in the Virgin without losing her virginity, and she remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus<sup>25</sup>. The author then states that God did not become a man in natural birth, but was

<sup>19</sup> *Ephraem Syrus*, *Hymni de Nativitate* 17, 5. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum* (Burgos, Aldecoa, 1970), vol. II, 492.

<sup>20</sup> "Maria templum est purum, in quo divertit Deus, aeternus heros; et ibi expletum est mirabili modo Mysterium per quod homo Deus factus est et Adamus a Patre filius appellatus est." (*Ephraem Syrus*, *Carmina Sogita* 1, 38 y 40. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, vol. II, 517).

<sup>21</sup> *Gregorius Nazianzenus*, *Poemata quae spectant ad alios*, 7. PG 37, 1.565-1.566.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Gregorius Nyssenus*, *In Christi Resurrectionem Oratio Prima*. PG 46, 615.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Severianus Gabalensis*, *In Natalem Christi diem Oratio*. PG 56, 390.

born as God of a virgin and at birth kept her uterus intact and her virginity inviolate, so that such an unusual way of giving birth would increase the faith of the believer<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, he would answer affirmatively to any Jew or Gentile who asks if Christ, being God, became a man above his human nature, and would put to him as testimony the inviolated seal of Mary's virginity after childbirth; for it is God who thus exceeds the order of nature, so that, being the creator of the womb and the inventor of virginity, he had an immaculate way of being born and of building for himself, at his own will, a temple in a mysterious way<sup>27</sup>. In this last phrase, Severian would seem to assume the Christological exegetic variant –if we interpret the temple that God the Son has built for himself as his human body –, thus complementing the clear Marilogical option of his first quoted sentences.

Several decades later, Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370/73-444) once again unifies these two interpretative variants, insisting many times on the figure of the “temple” as a double symbol of both Mary (her virginal womb) and the body or human nature of God the Son incarnate. So, in a commentary on the Gospel of John, he states that, after “*Wisdom has built his house*” and a more true tabernacle, that is, the temple built of Mary, the divine Word who is in the bosom of God the Father descended into her for a divine incomprehensible reason, and became a man<sup>28</sup>.

Cyril insistently supports the idea that the metaphor of the “temple” identifies symbolically both Mary (her virginal entrails) and the body (the human nature) that God the Son assumed from her. Thus, in book 9 of a treatise on worship, he asserts that the Ark of the Covenant is a figure of Christ, because, considering why the Only Begotten of God became man, we see that the Word from God the Father stayed in this temple that assumed of Mary, as if it were an ark in which, as the Scripture says, “*all the fullness of deity dwelt bodily*.”<sup>29</sup> Then, in book 10 of that treatise, he identifies the Ark of the Covenant with the human body or nature that Christ assumed from Mary, by reiterating that this Ark, which contained the Word of God, means the Immanuel, for the Word of God, was like a sacred temple, in this body he took from the Virgin. Thus the golden urn that contained the manna means the supreme and life-giving Word, as truly from the Father as it is also present in a sacred and unpolluted body<sup>30</sup>.

In an explanation on the prophet Malachi, Cyril expresses that, when it is said that the Son of God will come to his temple, this can mean two things: either that

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *Commentarius in S. Joannis Evangelium*. Liber Quartus, IV, 3. PG 73, 615.

<sup>29</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *De adoratione in spiritu et veritate*. Liber Nonus. PG 68, 598.

<sup>30</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *De adoratione in spiritu et veritate*. Liber Decimus. PG 68, 670-671.

the Word of God became flesh and dwelt in the holiest body of the Saint Virgin Mary as in a temple, or that he lived in a perfect human being, whose body was immediately complemented with the soul and divine providence<sup>31</sup>.

In an explanation on the Gospel of Luke the same Father reiterates similar concepts, pointing out that the temple is the sacrosanct and immaculate body that Christ took from the Virgin by the intervention of the Holy Spirit and by the power of God the Father, according to what the angel Gabriel announced to Mary: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*"<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, in book 4 of his commentary on the Gospel of John, Cyril argues that the Son of God is a single being before and after his incarnation, because, after it was done, his body is not something alien to the divine Verb<sup>33</sup>. In book 11 of this writing, he points out that the flesh or human nature is not holy in itself, but was sanctified in Christ, by inhabiting the Word through the Holy Spirit, by sanctifying his temple by changing it through the power of his divine nature. Hence, the body of Christ is now considered holy and sanctifying as soon as the temple of the Word has been made bodily united to him<sup>34</sup>.

In another exegetic writing, when interpreting the phrase of the Scripture, "*Wisdom has built his house,*" Cyril assures that, as Wisdom is the Word of God and he built his house, that means the birth and the human incarnation of Christ<sup>35</sup>. And this house that Wisdom has built for itself is the human body of Christ born of the Virgin Mary, in which the fullness of deity deigned to dwell bodily<sup>36</sup>.

In a treatise on Christ's incarnation, Cyril asserts that, by divine grace, the Word of the Only Begotten God was born of Mary, after assuming from her only the matter to make the temple (the body) and join it. When he was conceived, he did not violate his mother's virginity, nor did break her at birth, but kept her intact, thereby achieving an unspeakable prodigy<sup>37</sup>. In a plea against the Nestorians, the Alexandrian writer states that the divine Word was not made flesh merely, but assumed a living flesh endowed with reason. He was not conceived or born naturally of the Virgin, nor took from her the principle of his existence – for he exists from eternity as God and together with God, existing with God the Father, with whom he is known and worshiped –, but, building for himself a temple (a human body) in Virgin's womb, Christ existed at the same time

<sup>31</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, In Malachiam 2, 32. PG 72, 332.

<sup>32</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, Commentarius in Lucam 1, 42. PG 72, 754.

<sup>33</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, Commentarius in S. Joannis Evangelium. Liber Quartus, 4, 3. PG 73, 602.

<sup>34</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, Commentariorum in Joannem continuatio. Liber XI, X. PG 74, 550.

<sup>35</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, Thesaurus. PG 75, 262.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, De incarnatione Domini 23. PG 75, 1.459-1.462.



with the divine being existing from eternity and with the human being born in time, thanks to his double divine and human nature<sup>38</sup>.

In writing about the true faith, Cyril reiterates once again the dogma of Christ's two natures, pointing out that the divine Word from God the Father since eternity, and the temple (his human body) born at the time of the Holy Virgin Mary, integrating into perfect hypostatic unity, get the Word to live in this temple and the body assumed by him to be perfectly appropriate to his divine nature<sup>39</sup>.

In a treatise against those who deny the divine motherhood of Mary, Cyril asserts that Jesus did not exist as a simple man before joining with God the Son. Still, the Divine Word himself, upon entering the Virgin Mary, assumed for himself from her substance a temple (a human body) of his own and came out of her (he was born) as a patently real man, although intrinsically existing as a true God; for even after childbirth he kept his mother a virgin, as it did not happen with any other saint<sup>40</sup>.

Finally, after having identified until now the temple with the body of Christ received from Mary, Cyril then expands further his interpretation considering the figure of the temple also as a metaphor or symbol of the Virgin Mary herself. Thus, he reiterates in an Easter sermon that the divine nature of the Word was not circumscribed (not reduced or annulled) when he became incarnate in the body of Mary, in which it can be said that he "*dwelt as in a holy temple*."<sup>41</sup> In another sermon, Cyril praises the Virgin with these poetic terms:

*Hail, Mary, Mother of God, treasure venerable for the entire orb, inextinguishable lamp, crown of virginity, scepter of the correct doctrine, indissoluble temple, place of the one who can not fit anywhere, mother and virgin; through whom the one from which the holy Gospels say that he comes in Lord's name is blessed*<sup>42</sup>.

And in another homily in honor of Mary, Cyril corroborates a similar Mariological interpretation, by pointing out:

*"You conceived without semen, and divinely gave birth. God save you, Mary, the temple in which God is received, a temple certainly holy, as proclaimed*

<sup>38</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *Adversus eos qui audent Nestorii dogmatibus, ut rectis, patrocinari*, Capita XII, 1. PG 76, 394.

<sup>39</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *De recta fide, ad Theodosium Imperatorem*. PG 76, 1.142.

<sup>40</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *Adversus nolentes confiteri Sanctam Virginem esse Deiparam*. PG 76, 259.

<sup>41</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *Homilia Paschalis XV*, 3. PG 77, 739-742.

<sup>42</sup> *Cyrillus Alexandrinus*, *Homilia IV*. PG 77, 991.



by the prophet David, when saying: 'Holy is your temple, admirable in equity'<sup>43</sup>.

By then, Proclus of Constantinople (+ 446/448) also joins the bivalent exegetic option, by alternately assuming one or another of both variants. Thus, in the first speech in honor of the Virgin, he explains that, as the serpent of the devil had spread sin in humanity through Eve's disobedience, the Word of God, entered by Mary's obedience, has built on her for himself a living temple<sup>44</sup>. And in another paragraph of the same panegyric, he praises Mary as the temple where God became a priest (a human being) without changing nature, but by dressing for his mercy, the human priesthood, according to Melchizedek's order<sup>45</sup>.

In his third preaching on the Incarnation, after wondering when the flesh or human nature substantially joined God, and when the Holy Virgin prepared her womb for it, the author replies that the Word penetrated the womb through Mary's ear and the Holy Spirit built in her a living temple, so that the Most High was lowered to take the form of a servant, and Mary's virginal womb gestated such a great mystery precisely by divine dispensation<sup>46</sup>.

In a speech in honor of Mary, after praising her by calling her "*the secret tabernacle of innocence*," "*the sanctified temple of God*," "*the golden altar of holocausts*,"<sup>47</sup> in another paragraph of this text, Proclus reiterates that she is the tabernacle of the faithful who carried the living ark of both Testaments towards the straight path of salvation, the Tabernacle of the Testimony from which Jesus, being God, came out after remaining nine months as an embryo<sup>48</sup>.

In the first half of the 5th century, Hesychius of Jerusalem (+ c. 450) endorses the Mariological exegetic variant, when, in his fifth sermon in honor of the Virgin, he praises her repeating the solemn symbolic figures with which many Christian thinkers defined her. Hesychius points out that someone called her "*the mother of light*," another "*the star of life*," a third called her "*the Throne of God*," one more designated her as "*a Temple bigger than heaven*," another "*a Chair not inferior to cherubim's chair*," and another called her "*a Garden not sown, fertile, without farming*"<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Cyrillus Alexandrinus, Homilia XI. Encomium in sanctam Mariam Deiparam. PG 77, 1.031.

<sup>44</sup> Proclus Constantinopolitanus, Oratio I. Laudatio in sanctissimam Dei genitricem Mariam. PG 65, 683.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Proclus Constantinopolitanus, Oratio III. De Incarnatione Domini nostri Jesu Christi, 1. PG 65, 707.

<sup>47</sup> Proclus Constantinopolitanus, Oratio VI. Laudatio sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae. PG 65, 754.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 755.

<sup>49</sup> Hesychius Hierosolymitanus, Sermo V. De sancta Maria Deipara Homilia. PG 93, 1.462.

Towards the middle of the fifth century, Theodoret of Cyrus (+ c. 466) adheres, instead of to the Christological version, by expressing in a comment to Isaiah that the Holy Spirit formed in Mary's womb the temple (the human body) of the Word of God in the form of a servant (as a man), to which God joined the Word from the very moment of conception<sup>50</sup>.

At the beginning of the 6th century, Procopius of Gaza (c. 465-528) enlists among the holders of the bivalent interpretative stance. So, in a commentary on the Exodus he points out that the Son of God, who was begotten before all the centuries, was clothed with human flesh, and he who contains in himself the whole Universe built his tabernacle among us, as all the fullness of God dwelt bodily in Virgin Mary's temple as in an ark<sup>51</sup>. And in another passage of this treatise, he adds that "*Christ [his body], which is considered a temple that arose from the Virgin Mary, enriched his domicile, that is, the holy Virgin, with divine nature.*"<sup>52</sup>

More or less by the same decades, Severus of Antioch (c. 465-538) stands among the defenders of the Mariological position, when interpreting in his hymn 119 the verse of Psalm 131 "*Because God chose Zion; he chose it as a room for himself*" according to the following ideas: the Virgin Mother of God can be compared to that room of Zion; and she can be attributed the name of Sancta Sanctorum or tabernacle of the Covenant, because the Immanuel inhabited and lived into her and because also, similar to the Ark of the Covenant, built with gold and incorruptible woods, the Lord took the human body of the purest Mother of God, totally immaculate, without corruption nor intercourse<sup>53</sup>.

In that same 6th century, Leontius of Jerusalem also ranks among the defenders of bivalent interpretation. In his fourth book against the Nestorians, he states that the Word Son of God was begotten of God the Father from eternity in immutable, perfect, indivisible and complete substantial union with him, and then was conceived as a man by Holy Spirit's work in a supernatural and incorruptible manner, without intercourse<sup>54</sup>. In this way, the perfect being since the eternity and the one formed with bodily members in the chaste womb of the immaculate Virgin, the temple and tabernacle of the Word, were united in a single person, assuming in only one instant human flesh perfectly and wholly appropriate for him from the Virgin<sup>55</sup>. Here one can see the Mariological variant.

<sup>50</sup> *Theodoretus Cyrensis*, In Isaiam prol. PG 81, 311.

<sup>51</sup> *Procopius Gazensis*, Commentarius in Exodum. PG 87-1, 635-636.

<sup>52</sup> *Procopius Gazensis*, In Exodum 25, 26, 1. PG 87-1, 645-646.

<sup>53</sup> *Severus Antiochenus*, Hymnus 119. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum* (Burgos 1979), vol. IV/2, 59.

<sup>54</sup> *Leontius Byzantinus*, *Adversus Nestorianos*. Liber IV, 9. PG 86-1, 1.670.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

However, a few lines later Leontius offers his Christological version, when he rhetorically asks how not to praise this Virgin, who is increasingly recognized as the Mother of God, in which and from which the divine Word, after incarnating in her, proceeds as the husband leaves his nuptial bedroom, and through which Wisdom (the Word of God) built his house (the human body)<sup>56</sup>. And it is admirable that Wisdom has taken his home out of the Virgin's vulva, not according to natural laws, but against natural law itself; as the Word, going out and passing spiritually at birth through the intact vulva of the Virgin, kept her virginity, in the same way, that he, when entering her without flesh in his conception, did not need to be compressed<sup>57</sup>.

In the first decades of the 7th century, Modestus of Jerusalem (+ 634) joins the large group of thinkers who interpret the expression *templum Dei* in the double Mariological and Christological sense, applying this metaphor to identify both Christ's human body and Mary's virginal womb. In writing about the Dormition of the Virgin, he maintains that Mary was converted by God into the house of God, into the living space of his divine Son, who lived there without restriction, became incarnate in her by the work of the Holy Spirit, and, as a child, he who is God inseparable from his Father and the Holy Spirit, remained nine months in Mary's womb<sup>58</sup>. However, in another passage of the same writing, Modestus offers his bivalent interpretation, praising the Virgin in these terms:

*Hail, [you who are] very desirable to God, the living temple of the unbeatable Most High; in which the uncreated and enduring Wisdom of God the Father inhabited, and in which Christ God built the temple of his [human] body, which found in you his rest for the salvation of all, and that was pleased to assume you for his eternal and most glorious rest*<sup>59</sup>.

In the 7th century, Pamphilus of Jerusalem prefers the Christological projection, holding in a dogmatic writing that the Word of God, unique in nature within the divine Trinity and without communicating with anyone as for his person, came to us without leaving heaven; and, living purely and invisibly in Virgin's womb, the human body or substance was built (incarnate) as if it were a temple<sup>60</sup>; hence in his person and under his person both natures, divine and human, were

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Modestus Hierosolymitanus*, Encomium in Dormitionem Sanctissimae Dominae Nostrae Deiparae semperque Virginis Mariae. PG 86-2, 3285.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3302.

<sup>60</sup> *Pamphilus Hierosolymitanus*, Panoplia dogmatica 7, 3. In Alvarez Campos, *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, vol. IV/2, 433.

consolidated, and thus God was born from Mary with his divine nature, and as a man with his human nature<sup>61</sup>.

Towards the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th Germanus of Constantinople (c. 650/660-c. 730/733) stands as a staunch defender of the Mariological variant, as he frequently engages in identifying the Virgin as the temple of God. In his first sermon on the Presentation of Mary to the temple, after imagining this presentation at the age of three, Germanus argues that today she who was immaculate and the most august temple of the Lord, pontiff, and prince of all the priests, goes forward to be dedicated to the temple<sup>62</sup>. And in another paragraph of that speech, he greets the Virgin as the sacrosanctly built, immaculate, and purest palace of God, high King, ornamented with his magnificence, and which now constitutes the royal palace of the Lord and his holy temple, not made by human hand and radiant with beauty, in which the Word of God, wanting to redeem the wandering humankind, was incarnated to reconcile the banished humanity with God the Father.<sup>63</sup> In his second sermon on the Presentation of Mary, he asks how the Virgin is presented today by her parents to the temple through the priests, and how the one who is God's living temple may be placed in an inert temple (of dead matter)<sup>64</sup>.

In a sermon on the Annunciation, after greeting Mary as "*the living temple of his magnificent glory [Christ], who became a man and put on flesh*,"<sup>65</sup> Germanus praises the Virgin by calling her

*"the exalted and high throne of the Creator of the universe and of the Redeemer, with whose hand he embraces and fosters all things in heaven and on earth," and as "the living temple of the magnificent glory of the one who became a man and put on flesh to save us."*<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after, the Constantinopolitan theologian, in an imaginary dialogue between Mary and Gabriel, puts a few words in archangel's mouth, after notifying the Virgin that she will become the mother of God the Son, encouraging her to rejoice unrestrictedly, because she will be made "*heaven, and temple capable of containing God, and the living tabernacle of God, more capable, more sublime and more admirable than the seven heavens.*"<sup>67</sup> In another lecture on the Dormition of

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Germanus Constantinopolitanus*, In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae. Sermo I. PG 98, 294.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>64</sup> *Germanus Constantinopolitanus*, In praesentationem SS. Deiparae. Sermo II. PG 98, 311.

<sup>65</sup> *Germanus Constantinopolitanus*, In sanctissimae Dei Genitricis Annuntiationem. PG 98, 322.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

the Virgin, Germanus argues that much more than the temple of Solomon, Mary gave birth to heaven on earth, having been made a living temple of Christ<sup>68</sup>.

In the first half of the 8th century, Andrew of Crete (c. 660-c.740) almost always embraces the strictly Christological posture, according to which the metaphor *templum Dei* symbolizes only the human body of Christ, even if ultimately he also accommodates to the Mariological interpretation. So, in his first sermon on Mary's birth, he argues that she is the Mother of God, because he put on flesh in her womb, after building a new temple for himself, in conception and birth that did not corrupt her virginal uterus<sup>69</sup>. In his second sermon on the same Marian event, Andrew affirms that even in the Passion, the Hebrews could not destroy the temple of Jesus' most complete body, which he has built from the uncorrupted womb of his virginal mother, without intercourse. And this temple/human body died to give us life<sup>70</sup>.

In his fourth sermon on Mary's birth, Andrew of Crete praises her for being the "*Blessed among all women*," whom Christ God was born of, who, by his only power (*gratia*), and not by human hands, has built a temple for himself, namely his own animated body, by the Holy Spirit<sup>71</sup>. And in another passage of this fourth homily, he reiterates that God the Son has built for himself –not from a strange substance, but from the same mud and the same mass of other people – a precious and admirable temple (his human body), in which he, as the only Pontiff and King, completely received our human nature<sup>72</sup>.

Finally, in a sermon on the Annunciation, Andrew of Crete also assumes the Mariological interpretation of the *templum Dei*, as he praises the Virgin by calling her "*the magnificent temple of divine glory*," "*the palace of the King (Regis palatium) of sacred construction*," "*the nuptial bed in which Christ married human nature with his divine nature*."<sup>73</sup>

For about the same years, John Damascene (675-749) also assumes the bivalent interpretative variant, according to which the metaphor *templum Dei* means both the immaculate womb of Mary and the body of Christ. The statement that he includes in a speech about the Annunciation, pointing out that at Mary's birth Adam (that is, the human nature) built from his progeny for his Creator a temple

<sup>68</sup> Germanus Constantinopolitanus, In Dormitionem B. Mariae. Sermo II. PG 98, 355.

<sup>69</sup> Andreas Cretensis, Encomium in Nativitatem sanctissimae Deiparae. Oratio I. PG 97, 814.

<sup>70</sup> Andreas Cretensis, In Nativitatem B. Mariae. Oratio II. PG 97, 834.

<sup>71</sup> Andreas Cretensis, Oratio IV. In sanctam Nativitatem praesantae Dominae nostrae Genitricis, semperque virginis Mariae. PG 97, 867.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 875.

<sup>73</sup> Andreas Cretensis, Oratio V. In sanctissimae Deiparae Dominae nostrae Annuntiationem. PG 97, 894-895.

in which to dwell for the redemption of mankind<sup>74</sup>, is so ambiguous that this temple could be interpreted as Mary's womb or as Christ's human body.

On the contrary, the next two quotations of the Damascene derive clearly from the Mariological approach. In his first lecture on Virgin's birth, he praises her because her womb is the domicile of the one (God the Son) who does not fit anywhere, and for being completely the nuptial bed of the Holy Spirit, the whole city of the living God, glad for the emanation of the graces of the Holy Spirit<sup>75</sup>. And in another passage of this sermon, he proclaims:

*Oh, Virgin, overflowing with divine graces, the holy temple of God, in which the spiritual Solomon [Christ], prince of peace, lived after building it for himself: a temple, I say, not decorated with gold and inert stones, but shining with the gold of the Holy Spirit, and containing, as precious stones, Christ as the most beautiful pearl and ruby of the deity*<sup>76</sup>.

The bivalent variant of the Damascene can be seen in his second sermon on the birth of Mary, praising her for being

*"the temple, the most purely manufactured Lord's house, of which David says: Holy is your temple, admirable in justice; from which Christ, building for himself the temple of his body, turned mortals into temples of the living God."*<sup>77</sup> And a few lines later, he praises the Virgin as *"the house of God, effulgent with the divine splendors, [...] a house full of the glory of the Lord, and much more spiritually shining than the igneous Seraphim."*<sup>78</sup>

In the mid-8th century, John of Euboea takes up the strictly Mariological stance. In a sermon on the conception of Mary, he says that her parents, Joachim and Anna, took her to the temple when she was three years old to offer her to God as a real temple and throne; they took the Virgin, the living temple and the cherubic throne of God, to that temple built with stones<sup>79</sup>. And in another paragraph of that sermon, he says that Mount Zion rejoiced and the daughters of Judah rejoiced when the Temple of God (Mary) was offered to God in the temple of Solomon, and the immaculate little girl entered the Sancta Sanctorum quickly to fix in it his abode, with the great spiritual joy of the virgins and angels, a joy directed to the immaculate Mary, for being the temple of the Great King (Jesus)<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> Iohannes Damascenus, Homilia in Annuntiationem B.V. Mariae. PG 96, 643.

<sup>75</sup> Iohannes Damascenus, Homilia I In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae, 9. PG 96, 675.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 678.

<sup>77</sup> Iohannes Damascenus, Homilia II In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae, 7. PG 96, 690.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Joannis Euboeensis, Sermo in Conceptionem Sanctae Deiparae, XIV, PG 96, 1.482.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps by the same dates, Joseph, the Hymnographer (+ 883), adopts the Mariological position decisively, by frequently identifying Mary as *templum Dei*. Thus, in a writing about the birth of the Virgin, he exalts her that way:

*"You have been made the temple and palace of the King [God the Son], in which, making that supersubstantial being his room, he turns the faithful into the domicile of the Holy Trinity."<sup>81</sup>*

In an oratory piece on the Dormition of Mary, this author praises her for having been "*elevated to the heavenly tabernacles*", for having been "*the most chaste and immaculate Virgin*", "*the purest temple of God*"<sup>82</sup>.

In other Marian speeches, Joseph the Hymnographer invokes Mary by calling her "*the temple of God*" and "*a temple addicted to God for a divine begetting*"<sup>83</sup>, because "*you have been converted into the temple of God, oh immaculate child Mother of God.*"<sup>84</sup> In a song in honor of the Virgin, he praises her for being

*"the urn that contains the manna of Deity," "the ark and the table," "the lamp and the throne of God," "the palace and the bridge that leads to divine life."<sup>85</sup>*

In a poetic anthology in honor of Mary, after asserting that she was converted into the sanctified temple of God, who inhabited it ineffably<sup>86</sup>, he says that

*"Aware as we are that you are the temple of glory, oh immaculate [...] we implore your help very devoutly, insofar as through your venerable intercession we obtain salvation, oh chaste Virgin."<sup>87</sup>*

In another passage of this writing, Joseph the Hymnographer states that Jesus, King Maximum, who had made Mary his most beautiful temple, at descending to hell (upon death) made a dark empty cabin to resurrect mortals, as omnipotent as he is<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> *Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale*. I. In pervigilio Nativitatis SS. Deiparae Canon I. PG 105, 983-986.

<sup>82</sup> *Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale*. I. In profestivitate obdormitioni beatissimae Virginis Canon III. PG 105, 999.

<sup>83</sup> *Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale*. I. In sanctissimam Deiparam Canon VII. PG 105, 1.027-1.030.

<sup>84</sup> *Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale*. Theotocia seu Deiparae Strophae. PG 105, 1.063.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1258.

<sup>86</sup> *Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale*. Theotocia Ex Paracletica Graecorum. PG 105, 1.279.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.287.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.382-1.383.



### 3. Conclusions

Since the 3rd century until at least the 9th, many Greek-Eastern Church Fathers made frequent comments to interpret some metaphorical expressions, such as “*temple of God*,” “*sanctuary*,” “*Sancta Sanctorum*,” “*tabernacle*,” “*ark*” and other similar terms referring to spaces or containers reserved for deity.

The analysis of these comments allows us to verify a substantial exegetic concordance in those Greek-Eastern writers, since they all interpret, with slight variations, those metaphors as symbols of the incarnation of God the Son in Mary’s womb, and, ultimately, as symbols of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood.

However, there are three somewhat different, although complementary and interconnected, interpretative variants: first, the strictly Mariological one, according to which these metaphors symbolize Mary (more specifically, her virginal womb) as the Mother of God the Son incarnate; second, the strictly Christological variant, according to which such expressions symbolize the human nature or body in which God the Son embodies; and the double or bivalent option, at the same time Mariological and Christological, according to which the aforementioned metaphors symbolize both Mary and Christ’s human body.

Now, regardless of the interpretative position of each one of the masters of the Christian doctrine studied here, their almost total argumentative coincidence is evident, as, when proposing their respective interpretations on these metaphors, practically all of them adduce the same explanations or arguments. Such argumentative concordance undoubtedly reveals a strong influence of the early great masters of Christian thought on subsequent interpreters.

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