



# "O Virgo, templum Dei Sanctum". Symbolism of the temple in Virgin Mary's images in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries according patristic and theological exegesis [

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Analítica

Among the elements which have gradually been complicating the countless representations of the Virgin Mary throughout history, this paper seeks to highlight and interpret conceptually one of special doctrinal significance in some Marian images during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the temple, in whose interior some artists place some actual or symbolic episodes of Mary, from her birth or her Annunciation to the Sacra Conversazione, to give a few examples. Even though at first sight it looks as a mere scenographic or ornamental ingredient, without iconographic value, this precise shape of temple reveals in fact some profound Mariological and Christological meanings. In that order of ideas, this essay is based on a double methodological strategy: first and foremost, to analyze some Marian images which include in the aforementioned period the shape of a temple, in order to see what kind of role such a religious building plays in them; secondly, to discover the relevant keys for interpreting such images, by analyzing some specific texts of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians who identify with Mary the figure of the 'temple of God'. For this reason, after a brief introduction to the problem, the present study is structured into three main parts inextricably intertwined: in the first we comparatively analyze twelve Marian paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in which the Virgin appears inside a temple; in the second we explain the many exegesis that, in a consistent and strong patristic and theological tradition, identify the analogy of the templum Dei directly with the Virgin Mary, or indirectly with the Christ's human body conceived in her womb; on the basis of this double analysis of images and exegetical writings, the third part of the paper states as a synthetic conclusion that the artistic representation of a temple or a church building in some Marian images of this period offers a compelling plastic metaphor of Mary and, ultimately,

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