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Facta est Maria fenestra coeli. The ray of light passing through a window in images of the Annunciation from the theological perspective

Facta est Maria fenestra coeli. Promień światła wpadający przez okno na obrazach Zwiastowania. Perspektywa teologiczna

Abstract: This article aims to iconographically interpret the doctrinal meanings of the divine ray of light passing through a window in images of the *Annunciation* from the 14th and 15th centuries. To achieve this purpose, I analyze firstly a large *corpus* of texts by which numerous Church Fathers, theologians, and medieval hymnographers decipher several metaphors alluding to “light,” “Sun,” “star,” “window,” “door,” “crystal,” and other similar expressions referring to luminous phenomena. The next stage is the analysis of twelve images of the Annunciation that include this ray of light passing through a window. I complement this last analysis with some criticism of several unjustified “interpretations” made by some art historians and iconographers. The comparative analysis and the essential interrelation of these texts and these images help to justify the validity of my iconographic interpretations of the deep doctrinal meanings that this specific feature contains in the analyzed Annunciations.

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest ikonograficzna interpretacja doktrynalnych znaczeń boskiego promienia światła przechodzącego przez okno w obrazach *Zwiastowania* z XIV i XV wieku. Aby osiągnąć ten cel, najpierw została przeprowadzona analiza dużego zbioru tekstów, za pomocą których Ojcowie Kościoła, teologowie i średniowieczni znawcy hymnografii rozszyfrowują kilka metafor odnoszących się do „światła”, „słońca”, „gwiazdy”, „okna”, „drzwi”, „kryształ” i innych podobnych wyrażen dotyczących zjawisk świetlnych. Kolejnym etapem jest analiza dwunastu obrazów przedstawiających Zwiastowanie, które zawierają ten promień światła przechodzący przez okno. Tę ostatnią analizę uzupełniam krytyką kilku nieuzasadnionych „interpretacji” niektórych historyków sztuki i ikonografów. Analiza porównawcza i istotna wzajemna relacja tych tekstów i obrazów pozwalają uzasadnić słuszność moich ikonograficznych interpretacji głębokich znaczeń doktrynalnych tej specyficznej cechy w analizowanych dziełach.

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo interpretar iconográficamente los significados doctrinales del rayo de luz divino que atraviesa una ventana en imágenes de la *Anunciación* de los siglos XIV y XV. Para lograr este propósito, analizamos en primer lugar un gran *corpus* de textos mediante los cuales numerosos Padres de la Iglesia, teólogos e himnógrafos medievales descifran diversas metáforas alusivas a “luz”, “sol”, “estrella”, “ventana”, “puerta”, “cristal” y otras expresiones similares referidas a fenómenos luminosos. Luego analizamos doce imágenes de la Anunciación que incluyen este rayo de luz atravesando una ventana. Complementamos este último análisis con algunas críticas a varias “interpretaciones” injustificadas realizadas por algunos historiadores del arte e iconógrafos. El análisis comparativo y la interrelación esencial de esos textos y de esas imágenes nos permiten justificar la validez de nuestras interpretaciones iconográficas de los profundos significados doctrinales que este rasgo específico encierra en las Anunciaciones analizadas.

Keywords: Christ’s incarnation, Mary’s divine motherhood, Christology, Mariology, medieval studies, iconography.

Palabras clave: Encarnación de Cristo, maternidad divina de María, Cristología, Mariología, estudios medievales, iconografía.

Słowa kluczowe: wcielenie, boskie macierzyństwo Maryi, chrystologia, mariologia, studia średniowieczne, ikonografia.

Introduction

In the increasingly complex images of the Annunciation to Mary produced during the 14th and 15th centuries, one can see a ray of light as an almost essential element that, coming from God the Father (depicted in a more or less precise figure) and carrying almost always in its wake the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, descends towards the Virgin Mary. Those habitual details, easily verified in the Annunciations framed in that period by painters and sculptors of the various European countries and artistic schools, have also been mentioned by many art historians and experts in Marian iconography, among whom Émile Mâle (Mâle 1988; id. 1995; id. 1968 [1898]), Manuel Trens (Trens 1947), Giuseppe Maria Toscano (Toscano 1960), André Grabar (Grabar 1979), Louis Réau (Réau 1957), and Gertrud Schiller (Schiller 1971; id. 1980).

However, most modern authors settle for just mentioning those elements as mere compositional or narrative details, without much significant value, and

almost none stop to interpret the possible doctrinal meanings that such details may hide. After all, the episode of the Annunciation to Mary is decisive in the History of Mankind's Salvation since, as its consequence, God the Son's incarnation becomes real in Mary's virginal womb. So, one can conjecture that this beam of light and this figure of the Holy Spirit in the images of the Annunciation could have some theological scope. We will try in this article to give some plausible answers to such a conjecture.

Now, among the innumerable cases of the presence of this beam of light (with or without the dove of the Holy Spirit) descending on Mary in artistic representations of the Annunciation, some add a suggestive peculiarity: that of the beam of light passing through a window before falling upon the Virgin. These exceptional cases are precisely the ones we will analyze and interpret iconographically in the current paper.

To approach this study, we will establish four complementary methodological strategies. Firstly, as a result of in-depth research into the primary sources of Christian doctrine, we will analyze a large *corpus* of texts through which many prestigious Church Fathers and medieval theologians, and some anonymous hymnographers, interpreted several metaphors alluding to the Sun of justice, the closed door of Orient, the window of heaven, the light, the ray, the star, and other similar metaphorical expressions related to luminous phenomena. Secondly, we will examine a set of paintings of the Annunciation, produced in various countries of Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries, that include a beam of light passing through a window to verify the possible mutual agreement or differences in the treatment of this specific detail. As a third methodological strategy, we will highlight, whenever possible, the silence that many art historians and iconographers have shown about the ray of light passing through the window in the works to be analyzed, and we will even criticize the –relatively scarce– “interpretations” that some have given on that specific detail. In the fourth methodological step, the comparative analysis and the interrelation between the artistic images and the patristic, theological and liturgical texts will allow us to reach some logical conclusions.

In the first part of this article, we will analyze chronologically the arguments given by many prestigious Christian thinkers when interpreting these poetic, physical metaphors about gleaming elements to decipher their doctrinal implications. In the second part of the paper, we will analyze some images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th centuries that include as a meaningful detail the ray of light emitted by God the Father passing through a window before

falling upon the Virgin Mary. Finally, the comparative analysis between both sets, texts, and images, will allow us to reach conclusions about the essential relationship between those texts and pictures.

1. The patristic and theological tradition on *light, fenestra, porta,* and other metaphors of luminous elements

Systematic and in-depth research into primary sources of Christian doctrine has allowed us to document for more than a millennium –from at least the 4th century to the end of the 15th— a vast *corpus* of texts by Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers who assume and interpret the metaphorical expressions alluding to luminous phenomena mentioned above.

Since at least the 4th century and for more than a millennium, not a few Latin and Greek-Eastern Church Fathers and theologians refer to Christ as “light,” “Sun,” “Sun of Justice,” “illumination,” “Orient,” “flame” or other metaphors alluding to luminous phenomena. At the same time, these masters of the Christian doctrine allude to the Virgin Mary as “the window of heaven,” “a crystal window radiated by the Sun,” “the door of God,” “the door of Orient,” “the gate of the Sun,” “the star of the sea,” or similar analogies referring to a bay (window or door) that allows Sun’s light enter and leave, or a star that reflects Sun’s light.

So, in the second half of the 4th century, St. Ambrose of Milan (330–397), when interpreting Ezekiel’s prophecy about the Eastern closed door of the future temple that was to be built in Jerusalem after the destruction of the first,¹ reaches this conclusion: the remark of the prophet when specifying that “this door facing Orient” must be interpreted as meaning that Mary gave birth to the Orient, that is, Christ, the diffuser of the true light, as well as that the Virgin gave birth to the Justice. According to the author, this confirms why this Orient’s door is not open

¹ The Bible expresses this vision of Ezechiel in the following terms: “Et convertit me ad viam portae sanctuarii exterioris, quae respiciebat ad orientem; et erat clausa. Et dixit Dominus ad me: Porta haec clausa erit; non aperietur, et vir non transibit per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam; eritque clausa principi. Princeps ipse sedebit in ea, ut comedat panem coram Domino; per viam portae vestibuli ingredietur, et per viam eius egredietur.” (Ezek. 44,1–3, in *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam* [Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005], 847).

and will remain closed since it only received God.² As you can see, to justify the thesis of Mary's virginal divine motherhood –not yet proclaimed as the official dogma of Christian Orthodoxy³— as well as that of her perpetual virginity, St. Ambrose does not hesitate to turn the prophetic vision of Ezekiel to see Christ as the Sun or the Orient (where the Sun rises), and Mary as the closed door that allows Christ, the Sun and the Orient, to enter (when conceiving him) and leave (when giving birth to him).

Some decades later, St. Jerome of Stridon (c. 347–420) begins by assuming the already widespread patristic standpoint according to which the Eastern door of the temple prophesied by Ezekiel identifies Mary. Then he complements this Mariological interpretation with two symptomatic statements. Firstly, even though it is permanently closed, this Eastern door, Mary, is accessible and transparent (*lucida*) since it not only closes on itself (without admitting intercourse with nobody) but also communicates with the *Sancta Sanctorum* of the temple, that is, with the deity itself, for conceiving in her womb the divine Christ. Furthermore, this closed Eastern door is a lucid and transparent one, through which the Sun of Justice (God the Son incarnate) enters (when conceived) and leaves (at birth), the access door to the *Sancta Sanctorum*, through which Christ enters and leaves.⁴ For this reason, St. Jerome rhetorically confronts any eventual doubters with this reasoning: if they can answer how Jesus, after appearing resuscitated before his disciples gathered in the cenacle with the doors closed, showed them his body and gave them palpation of the sores from his hands and his side to prove that his resurrected body was not a ghost, he (Jerome) will also be able to answer how

² “Haec porta ad orientem aspiciebat; quoniam verum lumen effudit, quae generavit Orientem, peperitque Solem justitiae. Audiant ergo imprudentes: Clausa, inquit, erit haec porta, quae solum recipit Deum Israel.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De Institutione Virginis et S. Marie virginitate perpetua. Liber Unus*, 8, PL 16, 321).

³ Almost half a century later the first Council of Ephesus declared in 431 the divine motherhood of Mary as a dogma, establishing that Christ is a single person with two different natures, divine and human, integrated at the same time in perfect hypostatic union. This first dogma necessarily implies that Mary, being the mother of Christ, Son of God made man, was the true “mother (of the Son) of God (*theotókos*). Thus, this Council flatly condemned the two variants of monophysite doctrine, which considered Christ as a person with only one nature, be it human or divine.

⁴ “Haec est porta orientalis, ut ait Ezechiel, semper clausa, et lucida, et operiens in se, vel ex se proferens Sancta sanctorum; per quam sol justitiae, et Pontifex noster secundum ordinem Melchisedech ingreditur, et egreditur.” (Hieronymus Stridonensis, *Epistola XLVIII, Seu Liber apologeticus, ad Pammachium, pro libris contra Jovinianum*, 21. PL 22, 510).

Mary is at the same time mother and virgin, virgin after childbirth, and mother before consummating her marriage.⁵

More or less for the same years, St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), in a sermon on Jesus' Nativity, affirms emphatically that Mary was converted into a "window of heaven" because God spread through her to humanity the true light (namely Christ and the Christian religion).⁶ Augustine goes on to say that, for the same reason, Mary was turned into a stairway to heaven because God descended to Earth through her, and therefore humankind can ascend to heaven through her; so for those who believe that God fell to Earth through Mary, it will be possible to go up there (to heaven).⁷

Some decades later, the Greek-Eastern Church Father Hesychius of Jerusalem († c. 450), in a homily in Virgin Mary's honor, begins by taking up some Mariological interpretations already released by the Church Fathers on Ezekiel's *porta clausa*: in this order of ideas, he assures that some call Mary "the closed door [of the temple] facing East," who introduced the king of the closed doors into the world (Christ), and also called her "the door that emits or makes him to come out," for having been made the exit door for the Only-Begotten of the present life (God the Son incarnate).⁸ Hesychius adduces an argument similar to St. Ambrose's when affirming that Mary became the closed door facing East because Christ, who is the true light that illuminates everyone who comes to this world, comes out of Mary's womb as the husband leaves his royal bridal chamber.⁹ Hesychius bases his argument here on the text of the Gospel of John, which

⁵ "Respondeant mihi quomodo Jesus clausis ingressus est ostiis, cum palpandas manus, et latus considerandum, et ossa carnemque monstraverit, ne veritas corporis phantasma putaretur; et ego respondebo, quomodo sancta Maria sit et mater, et virgo. Virgo post partum, mater ante quam nupta." (Ibidem).

⁶ "Facta est Maria fenestra coeli, quia per ipsam Deus verum fudit saeculis lumen." (Augustinus Hipponensis, *Sermo CXXII (a)*. In *Natali Domini*, VI (b), PL 39, 1991).

⁷ "Facta est Maria scala coelestis; quia per ipsam Deus descendit ad terras, ut per ipsam homines ascendere mereantur ad coelos: ipsis enim licebit ascendere illuc, qui Deum crediderint ad terra per virginem Mariam descendisse." (Ibidem).

⁸ "alius te appellavit portam clausam in oriente sitam, quae introduxit clausarum portarum regem: necnon etiam portam emittentem te vocavit, quoniam porta praesentis vitae Unigenito effecta es." (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus, *Sermo V. De sancta Maria Deipara Homilia*, PG 93, 1459–1463).

⁹ "Portam in oriente sitam, quia lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in mundum, ex utero tuo processit, velut e quodam thalamo regio." (Ibidem).

says about Jesus: “Erat lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum” (Jn 1,9). Hesychius concludes by saying that Mary introduced Christ into the uterus (in the sense of conceiving him) and then took him out of it (giving birth to him) because neither being conceived nor being delivered, the King of Glory opened the closed doors of his mother’s vulva or broke her virginity’s seals.¹⁰ Like his Latin counterparts, Hesychius also derives fruit from metaphorizing Mary as the closed Eastern door of the temple, and Christ as the Orient and the true light that illuminates humanity.

Perhaps around the same time that Hesychius of Jerusalem expressed these ideas, the renowned Syrian poet Jacob of Serugh († c. 460), famous for his Syriac-versed homilies, exploits in many of them the rich possibilities of those poetic metaphors alluding to light, Sun and luminosity source.¹¹ Thus in one of his sermons in honor of the Virgin Mary, he proclaims:

Ab ipsa [María] magnus iustitiae Sol
exortus est,
atque lux splendida [Cristo] quae
tenebras e regione depellit.
Ipsam Pater voluit esse Unigeniti sui
matrem;
unde magna est pro omnibus natis
felicitas.¹²

The Sun of justice and the splendid light
[Christ] that expelled the world’s
darkness was born of her [Mary].
God the Father wanted her to be the
mother of his Only-Begotten Son:
Therefore the happiness for all people is
great.

In another Marian sermon, the author abounds in expressions of a similar astral and light nature when pointing out:

¹⁰ “Tu regem portarum clausarum introduxisti, atque iterum eduxisti. Nequaquam enim Rex gloriae, dum conciperetur aut ederetur, vulvae tuae portas prorsus aperuit, neque virginitatis vincula laxavit.” (Hesychius Hierosolymitanus, *Sermo V. De sancta Maria Deipara Homilia*, PG 93, 1459–1463).

¹¹ Due to the difficulty that the ignorance of the original Syriac language entails for us, we will use the Latin translation of the texts of Jacob of Serugh brought by Sergio Álvarez Campos in his *Corpus Marianum Patristicum* (Burgos: Aldecoa, 1981).

¹² Iacobus Sarugensis, *Homilia de beata Virgine Matre Dei Maria*, in Álvarez Campos, ed. *Corpus Marianum Patristicum* (Burgos: Aldecoa, 1981), vol. V, 22.

[Mary] Decora fuit valde, in feminis
splendida,
quia peperit Solem; qui non corrupti
neque turpavit virginitatis decus.
Vel si non esset virgo, volens Filius
Creatoris in ea habitare,
expediebat ut virginem desereret cum
exivit.¹³

[Mary] was decent and splendid among
women,
Because she gave birth to the Sun, which
did not corrupt or stain the decorum
of her virginity.
Or if she were not a virgin, the Son of the
Creator wanting to live in her,
It was convenient for him to preserve her
virginity when he was delivered.

In another stanza of that same versified sermon, Jacob of Serugh rounds out a similar idea by saying:

Virgo fuit pura quando in ea habitavit
Patris radius,
et virgo quando crescebat in alvo sua
parvulus.
Virgo portavit Fortem qui mundum
portat,
virgoque fuit generans Patris Virtutem.¹⁴

[Mary] Was a chaste Virgin when the
Father's ray of light dwelt in her,
And she was a virgin when the child
grew in her womb.
Being a virgin, she gestates [carries] the
Strong One who holds the world,
And was a virgin engendering Father's
Virtue.

Towards the first half of the 6th century, St. Fulgentius of Ruspe (c. 462/68–533), in a sermon on Jesus' birth, begins by pointing out that Mary enjoyed a healthy lightness during her pregnancy since she could not have had any weight in her belly, having within it the Light, namely, the spiritual Son of God, therefore lacking any weight.¹⁵ Then Fulgentius repeats St. Augustine's thesis

¹³ Idem, *Homilia de sancta Dei Matre et perpetua Virgine*, in *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, V, 52.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 59–60.

¹⁵ "Cum esset gravida, salubri levitate plaudebat; lumen enim quod intra se habebat, pondus habere non poterat. Facta est Maria fenestra coeli, quia per ipsam Deus verum fudit saeculis lumen." (Fulgentius Ruspensis. *Sermo XXXVI. De laudibus Mariae ex partu Salvatoris*. In *Sancti Fulgentii Episcopi Ruspensis Opera Omnia*, Paris, 1847, 899. This sermon was likely wrongly attributed by the Louvain theologians to St. Fulgenius. But Migne says it is not his. (PL 65, 898-900, Nota **).

literally when saying that Mary has been turned into the window of Heaven because God spread through her the true light among people; and she has also been converted into the ladder of heaven, as God descended to Earth through her, and so that humankind deserves to ascend to Heaven.¹⁶

Towards the end of the 6th or beginning of the 7th century, the exquisite Italian poet St. Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–c. 607/610), bishop of Poitiers, and enthusiastic singer of the glories of the Virgin Mary, retakes several times these symbolic figures. So, in two stanzas of his famous hymn *Quem terra, pontus, aetera*, which the Divine Office dedicated for the day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, he expresses lyrically:

Quod Eva tristis abstulit
Tu reddis almo germine:
intrent ut astra flebiles,
Coeli fenestra facta es.

Tu Regis alti janua,
Et porta lucis fulgida:
Vitam datam per virginem,
Gentes redemptae, plaudite.¹⁷

What the sad Eva took from us
You return to us with your nutritious
fruit [Jesus]:
You have been turned into a window of
heaven
For the afflicted to enter Paradise.
You are the gate of the exalted King,
And the shining door of light:
Redeemed people applaud
To the life given to us through the Virgin.

Venantius collects other astral and light symbols by proclaiming in his famous Marian hymn *Ave maris stella*:

Ave maris stella,
Dei mater alma,
Atque semper virgo,
Felix coeli porta.¹⁸

Hail, star of the sea,
Nutritious Mother of God,
And always Virgin,
Happy Heaven's Gate.

¹⁶ “facta est Maria scala coelestis, quia per ipsam Deus descendit ad terras, ut per ipsam homines ascendere mereantur ad coelos.” (Fulgentius Ruspensis, *Sermo XXXVI. De laudibus Mariae ex partu Salvatoris*).

¹⁷ Venantius Fortunatus, *Miscellanea. Liber VIII. Caput IV. De Sancta Maria*, PL 88, 265.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Two centuries later, the prestigious Greek poet St. Joseph the Hymnographer († 883) asserts in a hymn in honor of the Mother of God that the prophet Ezekiel saw her as the temple's closed door through which the Sun of justice passed, Christ, who plucked humanity from corruption.¹⁹ Furthermore, this fine poet affirms that the Old Testament prophets designated the Virgin Mary with the suggestive metaphors “gate, and mount, and holy tabernacle: the cloud of light, of which the Sun was born, the only giver of light [Jesus] for those who sit in the darkness and shadow.”²⁰ In another Marian canticle, he called the Virgin “the purest,” “shining gate” (revealed to Ezekiel) that “gave birth in an ineffable way to the giver of the light, made like us.”²¹

And in another of his numerous poems in Mary's honor, Joseph the Hymnographer praises the Virgin Mother of God, calling her “the Spiritual Door of Light,” through which Christ, appearing with all the beauty and splendor of deity, entered with us hidden under the stole of the flesh, invisible as God, but visible with our human form.²² Thus, this Greek-Byzantine poet stands among the large group of Church Fathers who describe God the Son incarnate as the “Sun of justice” who passes through “the closed Eastern door of the temple” (or through the window of heaven), that is, the Virgin Mary.

Already in the eleventh century, the mystical Benedictine monk and cardinal St. Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072), in a sermon in which he urges the faithful to rejoice and celebrate the birth of the Mother of God, who announced to the

¹⁹ “Portam te vidit Ezechiel, o Deipara, per quam transivit Sol gloriae, qui hominem a corruptione eripuit: quem deprecare pro redemptione servorum tuorum.” (Josephus Hymnographus, *Mariale. Theotocia seu Deiparae Strophae*, PG 105, 1163–1164). Due to the difficulty of using the Greek alphabet in the current paper, in all cases of Greek authors and texts analyzed here, we use the Latin translation brought by Migne in his *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*.

²⁰ “Sacrae prophetarum voces te praedicant symbolice, o Virgo, portam, et montem, et tabernaculum sanctum: lucis nubem, ex qua sedentibus in tenebris et umbra exortus est sol, unicus lucis dator.” (Josephus Hymnographus, *Mariale. Theotocia seu Deiparae Strophae*, PG 105, 1163–1164).

²¹ “Te lucis portam fulgidam vidit Propheta, o purissima: lucis enim datorem nobis similem factum ineffabili ratione peperisti, quem superexaltamus in universa saecula.” (Josephus Hymnographus, *Theotocia Ex Paracletica Graecorum*, PG 105, 1379).

²² “Portam spiritualem Lucis te, Dei Mater, nominamus, per quam ingressus est ad nos Christus speciosus apparens splendoribus divinitatis, occultatus in stola carnis, invisibilis ut Deus, in forma autem nostra visibilis.” (Josephus Hymnographus, *Mariale. Theotocia Sive Allocutiones ad beatam Virginem Deiparam*, PG 105, 1411).

world a new joy, takes up several of the metaphors alluding to light, splendor and radiant stars, when expressing exultant:

Today the queen of the world has been born, the window of heaven, the gate of paradise, the tabernacle of God, the star of the sea, the stairway of heaven, by which the Supreme King descended humiliated to the depths, and by which the humankind, that was lying prostrate, ascended exalted to the highest. Today the star appeared to the world, through which the Sun of justice illuminated the world. This star on which the prophet says: "A star will be born to Jacob, and a man will arise from Israel."²³

Almost three generations later, the controversial scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142) reiterates and summarizes similar ideas already developed by previous Fathers and theologians. Thus, after pointing out that Mary is the Eastern door of the temple, which always remains closed because she had no intercourse with anybody, he reiterates that she is correctly classified as a door facing Orient, since she is perfectly comparable with Orient.²⁴ The author argues this assertion by saying that, just as Orient is from where the material Sun rises to spread throughout all parts of the Earth, so Mary is the one by whom the true and spiritual Sun of justice, Christ, when born in her, spread the rays of his clarity to illuminate the darkness of the world.²⁵ Taking up the phrase of St. John the Evangelist, when saying that Christ „was the true light that illuminates everyone that comes to this world” (Jn 1,9), Abelard concludes with the well-known metaphor of the ray of sun that pierces the crystal without breaking or staining it: he points out, in effect that in this way this true Light, which is the Word of the Father, and his coeternal Wisdom with the Father, enters to us

²³ “Hodie nata est regina mundi, fenestra coeli, janua paradisi, tabernaculum Dei, stella maris, scala coelestis, per quam supernus Rex humiliatus ad ima descendit; et homo, qui prostratus jacebat, ad superna exaltatus ascendit. Hodie apparuit stella mundo, per quam Sol justitiae illuxit mundo. Illa videlicet, de qua per prophetam dicitur: ‘Orietur stella ex Jacob, et exsurget homo de Israel (Num. xxiv)’” (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia In Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae (VIII Sept.)*, PL 144, 753).

²⁴ “Sed haec eadem porta semper clausa permanet, et vir per eam non transiet; quia nullus virilis coitus. Quae bene porta ad orientem respicere dicitur, secundum quod ipsa orienti congrue comparatur.” (Petrus Abelardus, *Sermo II. In Natali Domini*, PL 178, 393).

²⁵ “Sicut enim ibi sol iste corporalis oritur, et inde ad caeteras mundi partes diffunditur: sic in ista sol verus justitiae Christus, secundum quod scriptum est, nascens [...], claritatis suae radios ad illuminandas totius mundi tenebras dilatavit.” (Ibidem).

through the Virgin, in the same way, that the clarity of the sun enters through a very solid crystal.²⁶

At approximately the same dates, the German polygraph monk Honorius of Autun (also known as Honoré d'Autun (1080–1151) repeated the well-known thesis that the Virgin Mary was the window of heaven through which the Sun of justice shone in this world.²⁷

At this point, it is convenient to draw an eloquent remark: the doctrinal tradition that sees the Virgin Mary as “the window of heaven” (*fenestra coeli*), “the door of the Sun,” or “the Eastern closed door of the temple” through which only the Son of God incarnate – defined as “Sun of justice” or “Heavenly Light” – passes, built by many renowned Fathers and theologians, is also reinforced by countless medieval hymns and liturgical texts in honor of Mary, most of them anonymous.

A substantial part of the immense *corpus* of Marian hymns has been collected and critically edited by Franz Joseph Mone in the volume 2 of his magnificent repository *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi*.²⁸ We will now extract from this book of F.J. Mone some stanzas in which the Virgin Mary appears typified as one or other metaphorical expressions mentioned above, mainly “the window of heaven” or “the Eastern door of the temple,” which allows the passage of the incarnate God the Son, described as the Sun, light, Orient or splendor of the Father.

Thus, for example, Hymn 352 (probably from the 7th century, inspired in a hymn of St. Venantius Fortunatus) expresses:

Tu porta domus fulgida,
Egressionis inscia,
Et virgo fructu florida
Virgoque nato gravida.²⁹

You are the shining door
You who do not know intercourse,
And you are a flowered virgin with fruit
And Virgin, who gestates a son.

²⁶ “Unde et evangelista Joannes: *Erat, inquit, lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum*, etc. (Joan. I, 9). Haec itaque lux, id est Verbum Patris, et coeterna ejus sapientia, sic ad nos per Virginem, quemadmodum claritas solis per solidissimi vitri specular ingreditur.” (Petrus Abelardus, *Sermo II. In Natali Domini*, PL 178, 393).

²⁷ “Ipsa quoque beata Virgo coeli fenestra fuit, per quam Sol justitiae in domum mundi splenduit.” (Honorius Augustodiniensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi exponuntur Cantica Cantorum*, PL 172, 503).

²⁸ *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi. E codd. Mss. Edidit et adnotationibus illustravit Franc. Jos. Mone. Tomus Secundus. Hymni ad. B. V. Mariam*, edited by Franz Josef Mone (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Sumptibus Herder, 1854). Thereafter we will quote this book through the abbreviation Mone, 1854.

²⁹ *Hymnus 352. S. Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 44.

Similarly, Hymn 375 (from the 11th century) of this poetic anthology compiled by Franz Joseph Mone abounds in analogous metaphors, stating lyrically:

Salve porta	Hail, door
Perpetuae lucis fulgida,	Glowing with perpetual happiness,
Maris stella,	Star of the sea,
Inclyta domina,	Illustrious Lady,
Virgo materque Dei	Virgin and Mother of God,
Maria. ³⁰	Mary.

Hymn 515 (12th century) assumes similar concepts about the door of the deity by saying:

Tu porta, quae soli Domino patuit,	You, the door, accessible only to the Lord,
Hortus, in quo Deitas latuit,	Orchard in which godhead is hidden,
Stella, quae solem saeculis attulit. ³¹	Star that carried the eternal Sun.

Furthermore, Hymn 370 (13th century) abounds on analogous metaphors, even with the eloquent detail of the “crystal” feature, when stating:

Salve porta chrySTALLINA,	Hail, crystal door,
Vivi panis officina,	Factory of Live Bread,
Divae mortis medicina,	Medicine for divine death,
flos mundi Maria. ³²	Flower of the world, Mary.

Some stanzas later, this Hymn 370 goes on:

O novum connubium,	Oh, brand new marriage,
Soli nubit stella,	The star [Mary] marries the Sun [Jesus],
Novum puerperium,	And a virgin gives birth
Parturit puella. ³³	A new delivery.

And in two other stanzas of this same Hymn 370, the anonymous poet collects a suggestive analogy –the ray of light that does not damage the crystal when passing through it–already used by other authors to symbolize the virginal

³⁰ *Hymnus 375. Alia de s. Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 68.

³¹ *Hymnus 515. De s. Mariae*, in Mone, 1854, 297.

³² *Hymnus 370. Sequentia de b. Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 63.

³³ *Ibidem*.

conception and the supernatural birth of God of Son incarnated in Mary's womb. This is what the hymnographer states:

Sicut vitrum radio Solis penetratur, Inde tamen laesio Nulla vitro datur,	Just like the crystal Is penetrated by the ray of the Sun, And, despite that, no injury Occurs in crystal,
Sic, immo subtilius, Matre non corrupta Deus Dei Filius Sua prodit nupta. ³⁴	So also, and even more subtly, God Son of God Born of his mother, Married, but a virgin.

Hymn 381 (13th century) mentions the Virgin Mary as the one who allows the birth of the Sun, giving birth to Jesus:

Ave, prolem genuisti, Ave, solem protulisti, Mundo lapsa contulisti Vitam et imperium. ³⁵	Hail, you begot offspring Hail, you revealed the Sun You brought life and power To the fallen world.
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Hymn 541 (14th century) sees Mary as the refulgent star of heaven, in her privilege of being God's mother:

Advocata inclita, hortus Trinitatis, imperatrix coelica, Templum Deitatis, stella coeli fulgida Summae claritatis, Esto mihi, Domina, Mater pietatis. ³⁶	Illustrious lawyer, Garden of the Trinity, Empress of heaven, Temple of Deity, Sweet star from heaven Of utmost clarity, Be for me, Madam, Piety's mother.
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Hymn 384 (15th century) adds the suggestive analogy that the Virgin Mary is a star able to generate the Sun when proclaiming:

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ *Hymnus 381. De b. Maria v*, in Mone, 1854, 75.

³⁶ *Hymnus 541. De s. Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 333.

Res miranda, res novella,
 Nam procedit Sol de stella,
 Regem dum parit puella,
 Viri thori nescia.³⁷

Admirable fact, new event,
 As the Sun comes from a star.
 While a virgin gives birth to the King
 Without intercourse.

Similarly, Hymn 399 (15th century), performed around the words of the *Ave Maria* prayer, takes up the analogy of the ray of Sun passing through a crystal, by stating:

Tecum Dei Filius,
 Qui te dedicavit,
 Et ut vitrum radius
 Solis subintravit,

With you the Son of God,
 Who dedicated you,
 And entered you
 Like a ray of sunshine,

Carne sumpta proprius
 Te inhabitavit
 Et nos sibi proprius
 Per te copulavit.³⁸

Dwelt in you
 As an embodied person
 And joined us to Him through you
 As a human being.

Hymn 472, proposed for the canonical hours *Nones*, praises Mary as the crystal palace of the Sun, when proclaiming:

Gaude templum marmoreum
 Et civitas solstitii,
 Castellum solis vitreum,
 Solis occasus nescii.³⁹

Rejoice, marble temple
 And city of solstice,
 Crystal castle of the Sun
 Who does not know the sunset of the
 Sun.

Hymn 600 (15th century) acclaims Mary according to various compliments extracted from *Song of Songs*:

Tu fons, hortus, platanus,
 Cedrus exaltata,
 [...]
 Tu fenestra vitrea
 Sole radiata.⁴⁰

You, fountain, orchard, plane tree,
 Exalted cedar,
 [...]
 You, crystal window
 Radiated by the Sun.

³⁷ *Hymnus 384. De eadem [s. Maria]*, in Mone, 1854, 79.

³⁸ *Hymnus 399. Oratio super Ave Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 104.

³⁹ *Hymnus 472. De gloriosa virgine Maria. ad nonam*, in Mone, 1854, 187.

⁴⁰ *Hymnus 600. Laudes Mariae*, in Mone, 1854, 411.

On the other hand, Hymn 604 (15th century) designates the Virgin Mary not only as the door of heaven but also as the gleaming star of the Sun, when declaring:

Lux solaris, clara stella Specialis Dei cella, Paradisi patens porta, Per quam salus fuit orta. ⁴¹	Sunlight, clear star God's particular room, The open door of Paradise, For which salvation was born.
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This suggestive metaphor of Mary as the star of the sea (*stella maris*) is very soon repeatedly taken by numerous medieval hymns. So, for example, Hymn 352 (maybe from the 7th century, inspired in Venatius Fortunatus) proclaims:

O stella maris fulgida, Absolve plebis crimina Gemitusque supplicium Immutando in gaudium. ⁴²	Oh, the shining star of the sea, Absolve people's sins Changing into joy The moans and the suffering.
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Similarly, Hymn 340 (10th century), written on the Virgin's birth, asserts:

O sancta mundi domina, Regina coeli inclita, O stella maris Maria Virgo mater deifica! ⁴³	Oh, holy Lady of the world, Illustrious Queen of heaven, Oh, Mary, star of the sea, Virgin mother of God!
---	--

Hymn 401 (14th century) abounds in similar concepts by stating:

Maria stella dicta maris, Tuo nato illustraris Luce clara deitatis, Qua praeifulges cunctis natis. ⁴⁴	Mary, people call you the star of the sea, You illustrate with your Son With the bright light of the godhead by which you enlighten all people.
---	--

⁴¹ *Hymnus 604. De laudibus b. v. Mariae*, in Mone, 1854, 421.

⁴² *Hymnus 352. S. Maria*. In Mone, 1854, 44.

⁴³ *Hymnus 340. De s. Maria (nativitas)*, in Mone, 1854, 26.

⁴⁴ *Hymnus 401. Ave Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 111.

Also, Hymn 399 (15th century), developed around the words of the *Ave Maria* prayer, takes up the same analogy, stating:

Maria tu sideris	Mary, bright
Instar luminosa,	Like a star,
Stella maris diceris	You are called the star of the sea
Vere radiosa,	Truly radiant,
Nondum nata crederis	Even without being born we believe
Tota gratiosa,	That you are all full of grace,
Carens spina veteris	Rose of heaven
Culpae coeli rosa. ⁴⁵	Lacking the thorn of original guilt.

Finally Hymn 418 (15th century), composed on the verses of the *Magnificat* canticle, asserts:

Esurimus coeli mella,	We are hungry for the honey of heaven,
Haec propina, Dei cella.	Give them to us, God's room,
Gloriosa maris stella,	Glorious star of the sea.
Tu por nobis interpella,	Intercede for us.
Mater Dei Maria! ⁴⁶	Mary, Mother of God.

Similar considerations alluding, with Mariological and Christological projections, to those same metaphors of light, Sun, star, Orient, and door or window that allows the entry and exit of light are also frequent in breviaries, psalters, book of hours, and other medieval devotional codex for public or private use. Thus, for example, the *Book of the Great Hours of Rouen*, one of whose copy belonging to the Municipal Library of Rouen has been recently published in facsimile by Orbis Mediaevalis,⁴⁷ takes up in one of its passages the well-known simile of the ray of light that does not damage the crystal when crossing it, by saying in primitive French:

⁴⁵ *Hymnus 399. Oratio super Ave Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 103.

⁴⁶ *Hymnus 418. Super cantico Magnificat*, in Mone, 1854, 127.

⁴⁷ *Grandes Horas de Rouen (s. XVI). Biblioteca Municipal de Ruan, Ms. Leber 155* (facsimile) (Madrid: Orbis Mediaevalis, 2019).

Tout ainsi que le
soupleil entre, parmy la vitre sans offence,
entra iesu crist en ton ventre: vierge
mere par excellence. Par une celeste
influence, en toy entra vierge honnoree
par loreille et sans violence, yssit par la
porte doree.⁴⁸

Just as the Sun enters through the crystal
without offending it [breaking/staining
it], Jesus Christ entered your womb:
Virgin Mother par excellence.
By a heavenly influence, honored Virgin,
[Christ] entered you by ear and
without violence [at being conceived],
and left through the golden door [of
the womb at birth].

In another passage, that same *Book of Hours* includes the song *Gloriosa domina excelsa supra sidera*, which is the second part of the well-known hymn of Venantius Fortunatus *Quem terra, pontus, aethera*, already cited. This is how the Rouen codex transcribes it:

Gloriosa domina excelsa supra sidera
qui te creavit provide lactasti sacro
ubere. Quod Eva tristis abstulit tu
reddis almo germine intrent ut astra
flebiles celi fenestra facta es. Tu regis
alti ianua et porta lucis fulgida vitam
datam per virginem gentes redempte
plaudite.⁴⁹

Oh, glorious Lady, raised above the stars,
you nourished with your sacred breast
who created you. What Eve took from
us, you return to us for your nutritious
fruit [Christ]; You have been made the
window of Heaven for those who weep
to enter Paradise, You are the door of
the high King, the door shining with
light; redeemed peoples, acclaim the
life that was given to us through the
Virgin.

As a conclusive synthesis, we can now collect the most frequent –almost obsessively repetitive– metaphorical expressions alluding to luminous phenomena with which the Fathers, theologians and hymnographers refer to Christ and Mary. Thus Christ is metaphorically designated by them as “the Light,” “the true Light that illuminates humankind,” “the Sun of Justice,” “the Sun of Orient,” “the ray of Sun,” “the Heavenly Light,” “Father’s ray of light,” “the Sun coming from a star,” “the ray of sunshine,” “the clear light of godhead,” and other similar metaphors.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

In perfect parallel, Mary is referred to by these Christian writers as “the Window of heaven (*fenestra coeli*),” “the crystal clear window (*fenestra crystallina*),” “the crystalline window radiated by the Sun,” “the window of heaven through which the Sun of justice shone in this world,” “the crystal palace of the Sun,” “the door of Orient,” “the door of Sun of Orient,” “the door of Justice,” “the *porta clausa, sed lucida*,” “the shining gate of light,” “the Heaven’s gate,” “the Star of the sea,” “the star of heaven,” “the Sunlight, a clear star,” and other analogous metaphorical expressions.

Thus, taking into account all these metaphors and to whom they refer, we can more easily understand the meanings of this divine ray of light passing through a window that we will appreciate in the twelve images of the Annunciation to be analyzed below.

2. Iconographic analysis of some Annunciations with a beam of light passing through a window

Based on the millenary tradition established by numerous medieval Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers about these metaphorical expressions alluding to luminous phenomena, we will now analyze a selection of twelve European images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th centuries that include a beam of light passing through a window on its descent towards the Virgin.



Fig. 1. Master of the Madonna Strauss, *The Annunciation*, c. 1390–1395. Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence. Web Gallery of Art

The anonymous Italian painter known as the Master of the Madonna Strauss (active c. 1385–1415) structures his *Annunciation*, c. 1390–1395, from the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence (Fig. 1) around a relatively sober scenery. With modesty and shyness, Mary appears seated inside a cubic room, at the end of which her bedroom is ajar. Carrying a symbolic stem of lilies⁵⁰ in his left hand, the angel Gabriel remains outside the house, with his knee on the ground, while raising his right hand in the double gesture of blessing the Virgin –*benedicta tu in mulieribus*⁵¹– and pointing towards above to indicate that his message comes from the Most High. Before the unexpected appearance of the heavenly messenger, Mary interrupts her meditation, slightly lowering her prayer book, whose open pages read the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy *Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium*.⁵² She raises her right hand to her chest with modesty and doubt, wondering with surprise how she could fulfill the divine plan of being a mother, wanting to preserve her virginity.⁵³ In the upper left corner of the painting, God the Father, in a tiny figure, raises his right hand to send a beam of light to Mary, in whose wake the dove of the Holy Spirit flies.

A highly significant detail is exciting for our purposes in this panel: the beam of light emitted by God the Father reaches the Virgin after passing through a round window (*oculus*), whose perplexing location in the center of the building's lateral entablature –untenable according to the mere constructive logic– is justified by the theological “reasons” exposed above. Due to the high relevance of this exceptional detail, one is surprised to not finding any commentator of this painting interested in interpreting the deep doctrinal symbolism of the beam of light crossing that unusual *oculus*. Some, like Vera-Simone Schulz, does not even mention the fact itself (Schulz 2018, 216, 218, Fig. 4).

Melchior Broederlam (c. 1350–*post* 1409) finished depicting in 1399 for the Charterhouse of Champmol in Dijon the *Dijon Altarpiece*: its central panel has been lost, and its two lateral wings, today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon, represent the *Annunciation* and the *Visitation of the Virgin to Elizabeth* (left panel), and the *Presentation of Jesus to the temple* and the *Flight to Egypt* (right panel).

⁵⁰ We have discussed the dogmatic symbolism of the stem of lilies in the images of the Annunciation in the following papers: Salvador-González 2013, 183–222; Salvador-González 2014a, 37–60; Salvador-González 2014b, 75–96; Salvador-González 2015b, 2–32.

⁵¹ “Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus.” (Lc 1,28).

⁵² “Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium, et vocabitur nomen eius Emmanuel.” (Is 7,14).

⁵³ “Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?” (Lc 1,34).

In this *Annunciation* of the *Dijon Altarpiece* (Fig. 2), Gabriel, after greeting Mary with the praise *Ave gratia plena Dominus tecum* (Lc 1,28), inscribed in the phylactery that he unfolds in front of him, respectfully kneels before the Virgin when communicating the message of the Almighty. Seating before the prayer book, the Virgin turns her face with surprise and fear towards the angel, while raising and extending her right hand in a gesture of accepting the God's stunning design announced by Gabriel. She is housed in a hall, part of a strange, complex building with a special temple appearance, whose contrast of Romanesque and Gothic architectural elements, combined in a single set, has been brought to light and interpreted by Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 86–89, 117, 131–134, 136, 166, 231, 288, 307, fig.104, 105, 164). This author sees in such a morphological contrast of this temple-like building a symbolic representation of the



Fig. 2. Melchior Broederlam, *The Annunciation*, left panel of *The Dijon Altarpiece*, c. 1393–1399. Web Gallery of Art

difference/transition between the Old and New Testaments, that is, between Judaism and Christianity. When commenting on this *Annunciation* of the *Dijon Altarpiece*, Panofsky underlines that the shape of this circular building behind Mary must be interpreted as the representation of the Temple of Jerusalem, and then he adds:

This assumption is confirmed by the sharp and doubtless intentional distinction made between this massive, domed, oriental-looking structure and the transparent Gothic gable of the adjacent loggia, the windows of which are illuminated by the gold ground that shines through their tracery and strongly contrast with the black slitlike openings of the circular building (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 132).

Some lines below, Panofsky complements his interpretation of the compositional elements of this panel by affirming:

Whether or not the three lamps — as yet unlit — in the chandelier suspended from the ceiling of her little shrine are a further allusion to the Trinity, we dare not decide. But certain it is that the placement of this shrine between the orientalist temple and the Gothic hall with its three windows stresses the doctrine that the Virgin's impregnation with the Holy Spirit marks the transition from the Old Dispensation to the New (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 132).

Panofsky seeks to reinforce this difference/transition through the interpretations that he gives on other elements of this pictorial composition, among them the windows and the beam of light. In this regard, Panofsky asserts:

The window being the accepted symbol of illuminating grace and, therefore, of the 'new light' (*lux nova*) of Christian faith as opposed to the 'darkness' or 'blindness' of Judaism, a triad of windows so prominently, even incongruously, placed upon a cornice and so pointedly opposed to the dark apertures in a building of different style, can mean only one thing: the Trinity, which assumes the form of physical reality in the very act of Christ's Incarnation (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 132).

Furthermore, in another passage from his commentary on the building depicted in the *Dijon Annunciation*, Panofsky states, with apodictic gratuitousness: "On the 'Gothic' side both the front and side walls are pierced by windows, again symbols of divine illumination" (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 133). What extractable arguments from Christian primary sources does Panofsky rely on to ensure

that the windows are “symbols of divine illumination”? It is a pity that Panofsky does not provide any documentary argument that could justify his shocking “interpretations” in this case. For her part, the German iconographer Gertrud Schiller, commenting on this Dijon Altarpiece, repeats Panofsky’s unjustified interpretations almost *verbatim*, without even citing him.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, one is amazed by the gratuitousness and the lack of documentary bases with which this prestigious iconographer exposes some of his “interpretations.” For example, Panofsky does not provide any documentary argument to prove that the windows signify the divine illumination, nor to demonstrate that they are symbols of “the illuminating grace” of the new light of Christianity, as opposed to the “blindness of Judaism,” nor to justify that the triple gothic window included in this panel signifies the divine Trinity, by making possible God the Son’s incarnation. Panofsky also fails to substantiate with sufficient credibility –only based on a quote from Charles de Tolnay and two simple words of a little-known medieval hymn— his otherwise correct interpretation of the Temple as a symbol of Mary,⁵⁵ in her condition as “Trinity’s Temple.” According to Panofsky, “It was on this account that the Virgin Mary could be acclaimed as the ‘temple and sanctuary of the Trinity,’ or more simply, the *Templum Trinitatis*” (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 132). As an “argument” for seeking to justify his interpretation, Panofsky adds a simple footnote extracted from a book of Charles de Tolnay.⁵⁶

So, it looks evident that the many arguments from Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers we have provided in the first part of our article highlight the extreme weakness of these unjustified “interpretations” of Panofsky.

Apart from the morphological details on which Panofsky insists when analyzing this painting, we are interested in highlighting in this *Dijon Annunciation* the circumstance of the beam of light that God the Father –surrounded by seraphim and cherubs in the left top of the panel— emits through his mouth, which, after passing through a Gothic window, falls on Mary’s head/ear, in a clear

⁵⁴ Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art. Volume I*, 49.

⁵⁵ We have studied this subject of the Temple as a symbol of Mary in the following papers: Salvador-González 2020, 127–145; Salvador-González 2020a, 93–110; Salvador-González 2020d, 56–68; Salvador-González 2021b, 115–133; Salvador-González 2021d, 525–553.

⁵⁶ The footnote by which Panofsky seeks to justify his interpretation states: “Cf. de Tolnay, *Ibidem*, 176 and p. 200. Note 18. The simple phrase *Templum Trinitatis* is used in a hymn ascribed to Theophilus: ‘Venustate vernans rosa... / Fons dulcoris, / Vas decoris. / Templum Trinitatis.’ (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 411, 132, n. 2).

reference to the suggestive thesis of the *conceptio per aurem* (Salvador-González 2015a, 193–230; and Salvador-González 2016, 83–122). This relevant detail of the ray of light passing through the window has been silenced by most commentators on this painting. However, we have already shown that this specific detail constitutes a *visual metaphor* that gives plastic form to various *textual metaphors* highlighted over more than a millennium by many Latin and Greek-Eastern Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers.



Fig. 3. Les Frères Limbourg, *The Annunciation*, miniature of the f 26r from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, c. 1411–1416. Musée Condé, Chantilly. Wikimedia Commons

In the scene of *The Annunciation* of the f26r (Fig. 3) from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (c. 1380–1416), the three Flemish artists known as the Limburg Brothers (active 1385–1416) imagine the house of Mary as a beautiful hybrid Romanesque/Gothic temple, with large and bright openwork tracery windows. Inside this building, kneeling in prayer on a kneeler before her prayer book,

Mary turns her face towards Gabriel, while raising her right hand in surprise and acceptance. Kneeling with a stem of lily in his left hand, the angel begins to communicate his message to the Virgin through the initial greeting *Ave gra[tia] plena*, which appears inscribed in the swinging phylactery that he displays with his right hand.

In the left top of the scene, God the Father, surrounded by cherubs and seraphim, and holding the sphere of the universe, breathes into Mary the beam of light that falls upon her, in whose head the dove of the Holy Spirit appears, according to Gabriel's announcement "*the Holy Spirit will come upon you.*"⁵⁷

It suits to highlight in this exquisite miniature the fact that the ray of light emitted by the Almighty "covers" the Virgin (*the power of the Most High will overshadow you*⁵⁸) after having passed through the crystals of the Gothic window of this shining temple, without breaking or staining them. As far as we know, this significant fact – whose doctrinal meanings we have already explained – has not been taken into account by commentators on this work, such as Erwin Panofsky⁵⁹ and Paul Durrieu (Durrieu 1904, 169–170).⁶⁰

Robert Campin (c. 1375–1444) raises his *Annunciation*, c. 1420–1425, of the Prado Museum in Madrid (Fig. 4), in the scenographic context of a splendid Gothic church. The painter places Mary sitting on a cushion on the floor of the central nave, in an attitude of meditating, absorbed in front of her prayer book, while the angel begins to kneel outside the temple without actually entering through its lateral door. In the upper left corner, surrounded by angels amid a splendid *mandorla*, the Most High irradiates to Mary a ray of light. It is important to highlight that the divine beam of light passes through the crystal of a window without breaking or staining it before falling upon Mary, whose head radiates a halo of similar rays. This eloquent circumstance, whose Christological and Mariological meanings we have exposed above, has, however been ignored by most commentators of this painting: such is the case of Max J. Friedländer (Friedländer 1967 [1924]), 34–44), Charles de Tolnay (de Tolnay 1939), Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 133, 175, 175, n. 13, 307, n. 4), Cyriel Stroo, and

⁵⁷ "Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te." (Lc 1,35).

⁵⁸ "et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi." (Lc 1,35).

⁵⁹ In his comments on *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, Panofsky (1966, vol. I, 34, 63–66, 81, 95, 150, 159) says nothing on the ray of light and the window.

⁶⁰ Paul Durrieu analyses this *Annunciation* in his monograph without mentioning the meaning of the beam of light passing through the window.



Fig. 4. Robert Campin, *The Annunciation*, c. 1420–1425. Prado Museum, Madrid

Pascal Syfer d’Olne (Stroo, and Syfer-d’Olne 1996, 33–34), Leo van Puyvelde (van Puyvelde 1968), Lorne Campbell (Campbell 1974, 634–646), Elisa Bermejo Martínez (Bermejo Martínez 1980, 1, 85–86, 79–93), Albert Châtelet (Châtelet 1996, 305, 306. n. 18), Pilar Silva Maroto (Silva Maroto 2001, 50–51),⁶¹ and Jellie Dijkstra (Dijkstra 1994, 312–329).

Gentile da Fabriano (1370–1427) imagines *The Annunciation*, c. 1423–1425, from the Pinacoteca Vaticana (Fig. 5) in a synthetic setting of cubic geometry, in which the two protagonists of the episode parsimoniously fulfill their respective roles. Just entered through the door with his luxurious cope still swaying in the wind, the angel begins to kneel respectfully before his heavenly Lady. Mary is seen at the final moment of the event because, in her open prayer book on the bench, her explicit consent to the divine will is read: *Ecce ancilla Domini. fiat mihi secundum verbum [tuum]* (Lc 1,38). Meanwhile, she holds with her hands her

⁶¹ In her comment on this art work, Pilar Silva Maroto says nothing on the dogmatic meanings of the ray of light and the window.



Fig. 5. Gentile da Fabriano, *The Annunciation*, c. 1423–1425. Pinacoteca Vaticana. Wikimedia Commons

swelling womb, in a clear sign of having already conceived God the Son incarnate. This fact is further suggested by the ray of light that God the Father – visible in a fringe of seraphim in the upper left corner— radiates towards the womb of the Virgin after passing through the circular window (small rose window) located at the entrance door. Now, in the current state of our researchs, the doctrinal means of this suggestive fact goes unnoticed by the commentators of this Vatican Annunciation, as happens to Emma Micheletti (Micheletti 1976), Andrea de Marchi (de Marchi 2006), Lasse Hodne (Hodne 2015, 33–36), y Vera-Simone Schulz (Schulz 2018, 216, 220).

Robert Campin (c. 1375–1444) stages *The Annunciation* of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, 1425–30 (Fig. 6), inside a well-to-do bourgeois room, where Mary, sitting on the floor and absorbed in reading her prayer book, seems not to have noticed the entrance of the angel, who begins to kneel before her in a gesture of blessing her.

In this luxurious room, endowed with elegant furniture, some objects stand out (vase with lilies, books, cauldron with water, tidy towel, chandeliers), many of which hide, under their apparent objectivity, some symbolic meanings, already explained by Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 129, 133, 142, 164–166, 173, 222) and other authors. However, we are interested here in highlighting, once again, the ray of light that, coming from an invisible God, the Father, passes through the crystals of the round window before falling upon Mary's head.



Fig. 6. Robert Campin, *The Annunciation*, 1425, central panel of the *Mérode Altarpiece*, 1425–1430. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Contrary to the usual compositional-narrative structure of this Marian scene, Campin has preferred here to place in the wake of the fertilizer beam of light not the typical dove of the Holy Spirit but the tiny figure of a Christ child, who, carrying a cross on his shoulder flies over the Virgin (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 129)⁶² as if to enter through her ear. Our interest here is focused on the fact that even

⁶² Panofsky highlights the presence of this tiny Christ as *parvulus puer formatus*, based on the research of Robb (Robb 1936, 480–526).

eliminating the familiar figures of God the Father and the Holy Spirit (dove), Campin, aware of the doctrinal meanings that such circumstance contains, wants to insist on the beam of light passing through the crystals of the window before arriving upon Mary.

Now, as far as we know, no commentator on this *Mérode Altarpiece* seems to have interpreted in its authentic doctrinal meanings this symptomatic fact.



One can remark such an omission in the comments on this altarpiece by, for example, Max J. Friedländer (Friedländer 1967, vol. 2), Meyer Schapiro (Schapiro 1945, 181–187), Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 129, 133, 136, 164–166, 235, 255), Martin Davies (Davies 1972), Barbara Lane (Lane 1984), Lynn Jacobs (Jacobs 2002), Bernhard Ridderbos (Ridderbos 2004, 19), and Felix Thürlemann (Thürlemann 2012).

Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441) depicts *The Annunciation in a church*, c. 1434, of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (Fig. 7), inside a monumental cathedral, whose stylistic contrasts and architectural elements we will not specify here, as they have been highlighted and interpreted iconographically by Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 59, 137–139, 147–148, 182, 252, 305), among others. Clad in luxurious gold brocade cope and pointing upwards with his right hand to indicate the origin of his message, Gabriel greets Mary with the praise *Ave gra[tia] plena*,

Fig. 7. Jan van Eyck, *The Annunciation in a church*, c. 1434. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

inscribed in a line directed towards her. The Virgin expresses her acceptance to the divine design by humbly stating her final consent *Ecce ancilla D[omi]ni*, written in another line –inverted from right to left and from top to bottom— directed towards the angel.

Besides the stem of lilies and the book of prayer –which represents the fulfillment of some prophecies of the Old Testament– before which the Virgin meditates, it is incumbent on us to highlight here the ray of light that, passing through one of the stained glass windows on the left side, and carrying in its wake the dove of the Holy Spirit, falls upon the Virgin. That circumstance, silenced by many commentators on this painting, such as David M. Robb (Robb 1936, 506–508), Max J. Friedländer (Friedländer 1967, vol. 2, 63–64), Craig Harbison (Harbison 1991, 175–176), and Amanda Simpson (Simpson 2007, 102–103), has been partly interpreted by Panofsky. The latter, after reiterating the symbolic importance of light in the religious scenes of the Flemish primitives,⁶³ stresses that in this *Annunciation* by van Eyck in Washington, the natural light, coming from the area located to the left of Mary, differs from the ray of divine light, which falls on the Virgin from her right side. Panofsky explains this issue in these terms:

There is in all Christendom no Gothic church having a full-fledged cathedral choir with radiating chapels that would face the West and not the East. And if it is hazardous to accuse the most observant of painters — and one of the most erudite — of a mistake in scale, it would be almost sacrilege to accuse him of a mistake as to the simplest law of nature and the most familiar of ecclesiastical customs. If he decided to reverse the laws of nature, he must have had a reason for doing so. And this reason is, simply, that the light he depicted was not intended by him to be the light of nature but the supernatural or “superessential” light which illumines the City of God, the Light Divine disguised as the light of day. With Jan van Eyck this light, though independent of the laws of astronomy, was subject to the laws of symbolism. And the strongest of these symbolical laws — so strong that, in case of conflict, it would take precedence over all other symbolical implications, especially

⁶³ Speaking on the *Madonna in a Church*, of Jan van Eyck, Panofsky asserts: “The symbolical import of sunlight —especially of sunlight streaming through Gothic windows— has so often been stressed in this chapter that no further discussion is necessary. Moreover, Millard Meiss has recently analyzed Jan’s picture and pointed out that its original frame was inscribed with the second stanza of the very hymn which, at the beginning of the fifth, contains the lines:

As the sunbeam through the glass,
 Passeth but not breaketh...” (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 147).

that of North and South — was the positive nature of the right and the negative nature of the left. The ray of divine illumination must strike the person blessed with this illumination from his or her right; and such is the case, for example, in Jan van Eyck's 'Annunciation' in Washington, where a distinction is made between the ray divine that comes from the Virgin's right and the natural light that comes from her left (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 147–148).

It is a pity that, having realized the essential difference between these two rays of light, Panofsky was not able to justify with arguments based on Christian primary sources the nature and the dogmatic meaning of what he calls “the Light Divine”. Panofsky neither explains nor documentary interprets the deep doctrinal meanings that this unusual beam of light descending upon Mary from her right encloses, as we have already explained. To tell the truth, Panofsky would have found sufficient and convincing evidentiary arguments for his interpretations if he had investigated the vast *corpus* of patristic, theological exegeses, and lyrical texts (hymns) that we have exposed in the first part of the current article.⁶⁴

In the narrow and hard space of a low *lunetto*, Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1469) structured his *Annunciation*, 1435–1440, from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (Fig. 8), according to an almost perfect symmetry: the volumes of the two interlocutors, kneeling face to face, as well as the architectural and



Fig. 8. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, 1435–1440. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

⁶⁴ We have made a first approach to the theological meanings of this ray of light in the paper: Salvador-González 2020c, 334–355.

scenographic elements located on both sides of the composition fully counterbalance around the central axis constituted by the pillar in the foreground. Kneeling reverently with a massive stem of lilies in his left hand, Gabriel offers his message to the Virgin, who, bowing her head and crossing the arms over her chest, shows her unconditional acceptance of the plan of the Most High.

Although invisible, being cut out by the upper-left edge of the *lunetto*, one can guess the active presence of God the Father through the circumstance that the divine beam of light that descends from the left with the flying Holy Spirit passes through the crystals of the first side wall window, before falling upon the Virgin. Based on the patristic, theological, and liturgical tradition, we have already outlined the relevant symbolic meanings embodied in his beam passing through the crystals of a window. Nonetheless, most commentators of this painting, such as Paul George Konody (Konody 1911, 33), Jeffrey Ruda (Ruda 1993), Giuseppe Marchini (Marchini 1975) and Megan Holmes (Holmes 1999) ignore these doctrinal meanings.

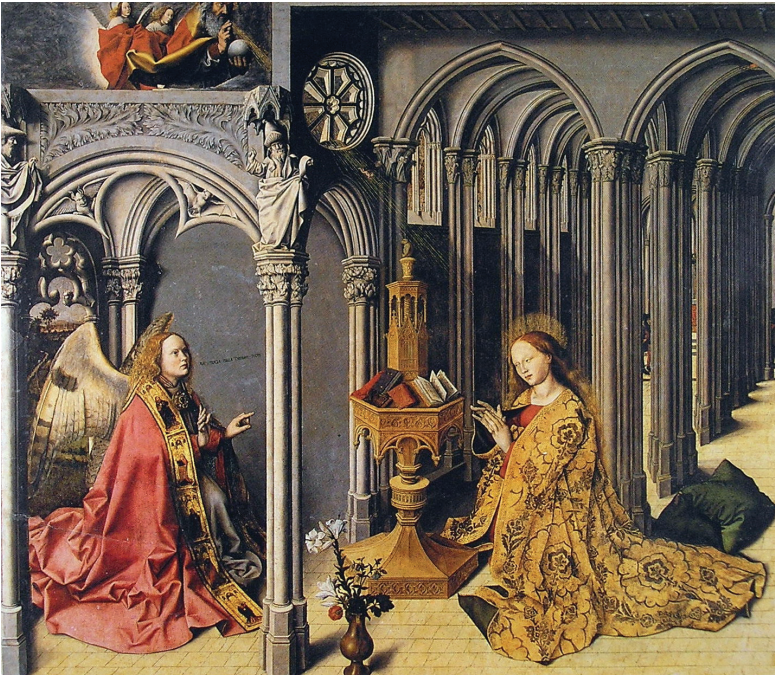


Fig. 9. Barthélemy d'Eyck, *The Annunciation*, central panel of the *Tryptych of The Annunciation*, c. 1443–1445. Église de la Madeleine, Aix-en-Provence. Wikimedia Commons

Barthélemy d'Eyck (*ante* 1420–*post* 1470) staged the story of *The Annunciation*, c. 1443–1445, of the church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine in Aix-en-Provence⁶⁵ (Fig. 9) inside a monumental Gothic temple. Clad in luxurious cope, the angel respectfully greets Mary with the praise *Ave gratia plena Dominus tecum*, which comes out of his mouth. Kneeling before an open book held on a refined lectern, the Virgin shows her surprise and modesty by lowering her eyes while expressing satisfaction at the will of God through the gesture of symmetrically opening the arms with outstretched hands, in a motion similar to the priest officiating the Mass. For our purposes, it is worth highlighting the circumstance that God the Father, blessing the Virgin from the upper left corner, breathes towards her a beam of light that crosses the lateral rose window of the temple carrying in its wake a tiny Christ holding a cross on his shoulders before arriving upon Mary.

In this sense, it is unheard of to see that such a decisive circumstance has been ignored by the commentators we know, among them Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 307), Nicole Reynaud (Reynaud 1989, 22–43), Rose-Marie Ferré (Ferré 2008, 163–183),⁶⁶ and Luis-Philippe May (May 1954, 82–98),⁶⁷ despite the essential doctrinal meanings that it contains, as we have explained above.

The Catalan painter Jaume Huguet (c. 1412–1492) presents his *Annunciation* of the *Altarpiece of the Mother of God* from Valmoll, c. 1450 (Fig. 10), with an evident influence on the Early Flemish painters. The artist imagines the episode in a beautiful palatial-looking room, opened by the back window towards a vast landscape. Covered with a precious cope, Gabriel kneels before the Virgin, to whom he points with his right index finger, while he displays in his left hand (carrying a herald's staff) a phylactery with the initial greeting *Ave gratia plena*. Interrupting her reading of the prayer book before which she meditates on her knees, Mary turns to the angel, to hear the heavenly message, crossing her hands over her chest to signify acceptance.

⁶⁵ On this Annunciation of Aix-en-Provence, see especially Yoshiaki Nishino (Nishino 1999, 55–74); and Rose-Marie Ferré (Ferré 2008, 163–183).

⁶⁶ Rose-Marie Ferré deals with the relationship between this painting and the medieval liturgical theater, especially the liturgical drama of the Annunciation; but she says nothing about the ray of light and the window.

⁶⁷ Louis-Philippe May makes a thoroughly positivist study of the historical data of the painting and its author; nevertheless, in his lengthy analysis of the stained glass windows of this church (May 1954, 89–93), he does not even mention the tondo with the lightning ray, so ignoring its doctrinal meanings.



Fig. 10. Jaume Huguet, *The Annunciation*, a panel of the *Altarpiece of the Mother of God* from Vallmoll, c. 1450. Museo Diocesano de Tarragona. Wikimedia Commons

As in the paintings analyzed above, it is worth highlighting in this *Annunciation*, as a revealing feature, the ray of light that, coming from the invisible God the Father, passes through the crystals of the small rose window located in the upper left corner of the painting, that, with the dove of the Spirit Holy in his wake, reaches Mary. This is a detail that, as we have pointed out in the previous pictures, has some valuable doctrinal meanings. For this reason, it is surprising that those essential dogmatic meanings have been ignored by the commentators we know of this *Annunciation*, such as Joan Ainaud de Lasarte (de Lasarte 1955), Josep Gudiol, and Santiago Alcolea i Blanch (Gudiol, and Alcolea i Blanch 1989), Joan Sureda (Sureda and Perearnau 1994), and the authors of the catalog for Jaume Huguet's fifth centenary exhibition (*Jaume Huguet* 1993).

Rogier van der Weyden implements *The Annunciation* in the left panel of the *Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi* (*St. Columba Altarpiece*), c. 1455, in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich (Fig. 11), in a luxurious living room, unusually dominated by a large red bed, whose relevant Mariological and Christological meanings we will not explain here.⁶⁸ In this unique environment, Gabriel, who still levitates in

⁶⁸ For the iconographic interpretation of the bed in images of the Annunciation, see our papers (Salvador-González 2019, 49–70; Salvador-González 2020b, 7–31; Salvador-González 2021a, 77–93).



Fig. 11. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Annunciation*, left panel of the *Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi* (St. Columba Altarpiece), c. 1455. Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Wikimedia Commons

the air clad in white priestly vestments (alb, stole, and cope),⁶⁹ carrying a herald's staff in his left hand, utters the laudatory greeting *Ave gratia plena Dominus tecum*, written in golden letters in a line that comes out of his mouth towards the Virgin. Interrupting her prayer before the open book on which she meditates, kneeling in a prie-dieu, Mary turns her face towards the angel while raising her right hand extended over the book (a sign of oath) to express her conformity to the will of the Most High transmitted by the heavenly messenger.

⁶⁹ For an iconographic analysis of some liturgical vestments, see Ángel Pazos López (López 2019, 241–278).

In this unique atmosphere of an intimate dialogue between the two protagonists of this Marian event, the beam of light stands out in a special way: coming from an invisible God the Father, this beam passes through the stained-glass of the first window on the left before falling upon the Virgin, carrying in its wake the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. All these details reveal that the iconographic designer of this panel knows undoubtedly the outstanding dogmatic meanings that they contain, as explained above. Therefore, it is disappointing to note that most commentators of this *Columba Annunciation* have omitted to refer to the doctrinal meanings of this divine ray passing through the window panes. Such is the case of Max J, Friedländer,⁷⁰ Martin Davies (Davies 1972), Odile Delenda (Delenda 1987), Paul Philippot (Philippot 1994, 40),⁷¹ Albert Châtelet (Châtelet 1999a, 112–117; Châtelet 1999b, 195–200),⁷² Elisabeth Dhanens and Jellie Dijkstra (Dhanens and Dijkstra 1999, 350),⁷³ Dirk De Vos (De Vos 2002), Bernard Ridderbos (Ridderbos 2004, 36–42), Stephan Kemperdick (Kemperdick 2000),⁷⁴ Lorne Campbell and Jan van der Stock (Campbell and van der Stock 2009), and Lorne Campbell *et alii* (Campbell, ed., 2015). To top it off, Erwin Panofsky, when commenting on this *Columba Annunciation*, mentions the window only as an insignificant element of the composition, lacking any dogmatic symbolism.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ In commenting this St. Columba's Annunciation, Friedländer not even mentions the ray of light passing through the window (Friedländer 1967, vol. 2, 72).

⁷¹ In his comments on this St. Columba Annunciation, Paul Philippot does not mention the symbolism of the beam traversing the window.

⁷² When commenting in his two books on the artist this *Columba Annunciation*, Albert Châtelet does not explain the doctrinal meanings of the ray of light and the window.

⁷³ In their comment on this *St. Columba Annunciation*, Elisabeth Dhanens, and Jellie Dijkstra do not explain the doctrinal symbolism of the beam of light passing through the window.

⁷⁴ Similarly, when commenting this *Columba Annunciation* in other book (Kemperdick, and Sandber 2009, 96, 100–101) Kemperdick says nothing about the symbolic meanings of this beam of light passing through the window.

⁷⁵ In his extended analysis of this *Columba Altarpiece*, Panofsky says nothing about the doctrinal meanings of the ray of light passing through the window (Panofsky 1966, vol. I, 286–288). He only brings this banal statement: "It seems the most natural thing in the world that the wall of the chamber is pierced by a stained glass window even more sumptuous than that of the regal hall in which is portrayed by St. Luke as the Madonna Enthroned". (Ibidem, 287).



Fig. 12. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, c. 1467–1469. Cathedral of Spoleto. Wikimedia Commons

Fra Filippo Lippi raises *The Annunciation*, c. 1467–1469, frescoed in the apse of the Spoleto cathedral (Fig. 12), in the context of a splendid Renaissance palace.⁷⁶ Carrying a stem of lilies in his left hand, Gabriel is kneeling in the external courtyard, at the end of which you can see a walled garden which, even having an open door to the exterior landscape, suggests the Marian metaphor of the *hortus conclusus*.⁷⁷ In a room of this palace, the Virgin, seated in a strange irregular piece of furniture, turns her face downcast towards the celestial messenger while raising her right hand to accept the divine design that he announces to her.

Levitating in the upper left of the fresco with an escort of angels, God the Father blesses/chooses Mary as the mother of God the Son incarnate while sending towards her the fertile ray of light that carries in its wake the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁶ We have studied the doctrinal meanings of the Mary's house shaped as a palace in the papers: Salvador-González 2021c, 391–406; Salvador-González 2021e, 111–135.

⁷⁷ The Christian writers interpret the passage of the *Song of Songs* “Hortus conclusus, soror mea Sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus” (Cant 4,12) as a metaphor of Mary's perpetual virginity.

It is crucial in this case to remark the revealing detail that this beam of light passes through a barred window before reaching Mary, a feature that illustrates the doctrinal symbolisms we have explained above.

As far as we know, the commentators of this Lippi fresco, such as Paul George Konody (Konody 1911, 33), Giuseppe Marchini (Marchini 1975), Jeffrey Ruda (Ruda 1993), Stefano Zuffi (Zuffi 2005), and Megan Holmes (Holmes 1999), ignore the dogmatic symbolisms of this ray of light passing through the window.

Once analyzed the twelve images of the Annunciation representative of the subject under scrutiny, it is time to reach some conclusions based on the comparative analyses of these twelve Annunciations and the numerous texts of the Church Fathers, theologians, and medieval hymnographers when interpreting with a Mariological and Christological projection, the metaphorical expressions related to light, window (or door), Sun, Orient and the other similar metaphors alluding to some gleaming phenomena.

Conclusions

As a result of our double methodological comparative analysis of images and texts, we can safely infer some essential conclusions:

For more than a millennium, from the early testimonies of St. Ambrose and St. Jerome in the 4th century to the liturgical hymns of the 15th century, many Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers coincide to a greater or lesser extent in interpreting several metaphors alluding to Christ and Mary. Christ, God the Son incarnate, is seen by them as the Light that illuminates the whole world, the Sun of justice, the Orient, the ray of sunlight piercing the crystal without breaking or staining it, or other similar analogies. Mary, for her part, is perceived as the window of God or heaven, the door of heaven, the shining door, the Eastern gate of the temple that allows the Orient to enter and exit, the shining star, the star of the sea, or other similar figures of supernatural radiance.

The comparative analysis between these two sets of iconic and textual expressions studied here –the twelve images of the Annunciation and the patristic, theological and liturgical texts– makes logical to confirm their essential relationship: the texts, as documentary arguments that justify and *textually explain* the images; the images, as illustrations that *visually “explain”* the doctrinal contents of these texts.

According to the patristic, theological, and devotional texts mentioned above, such metaphorical expressions alluding to Christ and the Virgin signify the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity, in her two crucial moments: when she virginally conceives the Son of God without intercourse, and when she gives birth to him without losing her virginity. That explains the double-crossing action –to enter (to be conceived); to leave (to be born)– by Christ, the ray of Light of the divine Sun of Justice, through Mary, the “window of Heaven” and the “closed Eastern door of the temple.”

That is why several European artists of the 14th and 15th centuries include in some images of the Annunciation the detail of the divine fertilizing ray coming from God the Father passing through a window before falling upon Mary. This painted window subtly represents the Virgin Mary not only as a refulgent (*lucida*) and crystal clear (*crystallina*) “window of Heaven” but also as a closed “Eastern door” that lets the Sun of Orient pass.

The significant efficacy of the transparent crystal window depicted in these Annunciations can also be extended logically to Ezekiel’s opaque “closed door.” Indeed, the Christian writers and the anonymous hymnographers analyzed here resort to the metaphors of the window and the door –both connoted architectural openings— with simultaneous Mariological and Christological projection due to the prodigious power that both (window and door) have, thanks to the divine power, to let the ray of the light pass without breaking or staining the crystal (window), and to let go in and out the Eastern Sun without opening or breaking the closure (door) of virginity. So, the pictorial representation of the crystalline window (*fenestra vitrea*) allowing the divine beam of light to pass through in these Annunciations also signifies Ezekiel’s *porta clausa* allowing the Eastern Sun to enter and and leave without opening it. There are not a few images of the Annunciation in the 14th and 15th centuries in which the ray of light passes through a door instead of a window. However, we did not analyze any of these paintings with the ray passing by a door, not only for not excessively lengthening this article, but also, and above all, because the cases of the ray of light passing through a window are more suggestive and unusual.

The many exegeses of the Christian authors exposed here refer both to the virginal conception of the Son of God and his supernatural birth without breaking his mother’s virginity. This means that, in the analyzed images, we could interpret in a double direction the beam of light passing through the crystal window: entering through the window without breaking or staining it (the vir-

ginal conception without intercourse) and leaving through the window without rupture nor stain (the supernatural birth without destroying the virginity).

In the end, we can infer that the artists who presented in their Annunciations the ray of light passing through a window used this unusual circumstance –sometimes forcing too much the logical and predictable situation of the elements depicted– as a rhetorical argument, namely: as a *visual metaphor* capable of illustrating the *textual metaphors* through which many Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers symbolized the profound theological content referring to the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the virginal conception and the supernatural birth of God the Son incarnate.

Additional precision is necessary. There is no reason to think that all the painters who depicted the Annunciations analyzed here had such refined theological culture as to be able to understand and metaphorize by themselves these complex dogmatic contents: such thought would suppose the improbable conjecture that these painters knew thoroughly the patristic, theological, and liturgical sources on which such content is based. It is reasonable, on the contrary, to think that –not only in the case of the Annunciation but on many other even more complicated doctrinal subjects– the painter who received an important commission for sacred art had an intellectual mentor (almost always a friar or a clergyman) that would dictate the guidelines –characters, scenery, situations, attitudes, attributes, etc.– of what and how the subject should be represented in any case. In fact, with very few exceptions by artists of recognized religious and humanistic culture, like Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi, Fra Carnevale, Fra Bartolomeo, almost all painters and sculptors only needed the perfect knowledge and skill of their craft (drawing, composition, coloring, techniques) for being the material authors of the work of art. Instead, the iconographic program was almost always designed by a clergyman or a scholar, the genuine intellectual author of this artistic image.

Ultimately, regardless of who were the intellectual authors of the Annunciations analyzed here –which, at best, could coincide with their material authors–, we can underline a vital remark: these paintings illustrate, with the rare detail of the divine ray of light passing through a window without breaking or staining it, the hidden Mariological and Christological meanings documented above.

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