



2020.004

Unidentified artist

Allegory of the Holy Eucharist

Peru, probably Cuzco

Mid-eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 35 ¼ x 27 ¾ inches

Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, inv. no. 2020.004

Inscriptions on banderoles, from upper left: *Cor suum dabit in similitudinem picturae. Eccles. 38. v. 31.*; *Pone me ut signaculum super cor tuum. Cant. 8. v.6.*; *Secundum cor tuum fecisti omnia magnolia. 2. Reg.7. v.2.*; From bottom right up: *Ita ut notem faceres servo tuo. 2 Reg. 7. V.2.*; *Quia fortis et ut mors dilectio. Cant. 8. v.6.*; *Cor suum dabit in consummationem operum. Eccles. 38. v. 28.*



Fig. 1. Unidentified Workshop, Peru, Cuzco, *Defense of the Eucharist by King Philip V of Spain*, c. 1700-1746, oil on canvas, Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma (inv. no. 1997.009).

Along with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the doctrine of the presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the wine and bread of Holy Communion (transubstantiation) was staunchly defended by the Spanish monarchs. This defense of the Eucharist is illustrated in this painting (fig. 1) in the Thoma collection, one of a number of such representations that were created in the Viceroyalty of Peru during the colonial era. Here the Eucharist is symbolized as a gold monstrance, which the king defends with his sword against heretics. In this instance, heresy is personified by Muslims wearing turbans and wielding scimitars.

The defense of the Eucharist, or the triumph of the Eucharist, is pictured in a great many paintings created after the Council of Trent (1545-1564), including the great tapestry designs by Peter Paul Rubens for the Spanish king. In the Thoma painting, which represents an *Allegory of the Holy Eucharist*, the monstrance is replaced by an image of Jesus Christ's Sacred Heart nailed to the cross, which is sustained by Saint Michael the Archangel. It is clear that this painting, another by the New Spanish artist Miguel Cabrera of 1750 (fig. 2), and Miguel A. Ballejo y Mandujano's decorations at Santa Rosa de Viterbo in Querétaro (fig. 3), all depend on a single print source.



Fig. 2. Miguel Cabrera, *Allegory of the Holy Eucharist*, 1750, oil on copper, 43.5 x 33.5 cm. Museo Andrés Blaisten, Mexico City.



Fig. 3. Miguel A. Ballejo y Mandujano, *Chapel of the Sacred Hearts*, 1752, oil on canvas and mural. Templo de Santa Rosa de Viterbo, Querétaro, Mexico.

The key to interpreting the elaborate allegory presented in this composition, which reveals the intervention of a learned cleric, is the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was spread throughout Spanish America by the Jesuits. The height of the popularity of the cult was around the mid-eighteenth century when the Thoma painting was created. The devotion was controversial: when the Jesuits were expelled from all the Spanish realms in 1767, King Carlos III delivered an order to destroy all the images of the Sacred Heart in his dominions.¹

Fortunately, the king's mandate was ineffectual, sparing the Thoma painting and many others, particularly in New Spain where the cult was most popular.

Surrounding the image of the Sacred Heart on the cross sustained by Saint Michael the Archangel, other archangels frame the composition, bearing banderoles with Biblical quotations related to the Sacred Heart. They are Jehudiel, Raphael, Sealteal, Uriel, Gabriel, and Barachiel, each identifiable by accompanying motifs. The references include "He shall give his heart to the resemblance of the picture" (Ecclesiasticus 38:28) and "According to thine own heart thou hast done all great things" (2 Samuel 7).

Beneath Saint Michael, the image of the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) rests on the scrolls closed by the seven seals described in the Book of Revelation 6:1-17 and 8:1-5. In the vision of Saint John, as the Lamb (Jesus Christ) opens each seal, the judgments of God for the period of tribulation are revealed. The image of the lamb resting on the scrolls was widely applied to tabernacle doors, altar frontals and missal stands throughout Spanish America. In this painting, the lamb and the sealed scrolls rest on the paired hearts of Mary and Jesus.

This composition was intended for the devotional practice of a member of the literate elite, who would have contemplated upon the words as well as the dramatic image of the very heart of Christ nailed to the cross, emblematic of his supreme sacrifice.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

¹Lauren G. Kilroy-Ewbank, *Holy Organ or Unholy Idol? The Sacred Heart in the Art, Religion, and Politics of New Spain* (Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2018), 6-7.