



2003.001

Unidentified Artist

Peru

*Christ Crucified Contemplated by Saints Francis and Clare*

Seventeenth century

Oil on canvas, 80 x 56 inches

Saint Francis of Assisi died in 1226 and was canonized by Gregory IX in 1228, only two years after his death. In 1390 Bartolomeo da Pisa wrote his *Liber Conformitatem*, a concordance of the remarkable similarities between the life of Christ and the life of Saint Francis. The latter was likened to a “second son of God,” whose birth was announced by an angel, and, like Christ, was said to have been born in a stable, and so on. The stigmata, the manifestations of Christ’s wounds on Francis’ body, were said by the hagiographer to make Francis seem so similar to Christ that the Virgin Mary herself could hardly distinguish him from her own Son. Saint Francis shared the pain of Christ’s death on the cross – the real meaning of “compassion.”

Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-1253) was one of the earliest and most dedicated followers of Francis of Assisi. She founded an order of nuns first called the Order of Poor Ladies, later formalized as the Order of Saint Clare, still often called the “Poor Clares.” Following the example of Saint Francis members of the female order (called “*Clarisas*” in Spanish) were committed to lives of poverty. Like Saint Francis, Clare was declared a saint only two years after her death. In art, she is pictured with an emblematic monstrance or pyx, but when shown together with Saint Francis, as in this painting and an early example by Angelino Medoro (fig. 1), she needs no distinguishing emblem.



Fig. 1. Angelino Medoro, *Virgin and Child with Saints Francis and Clare*, ca. 1602, oil on canvas, 216 x 161 cm. Museo Colonial de San Francisco Santiago, Chile.

The Thoma painting does not represent the Crucifixion as an event, but as a visionary experience. The distinction between epiphany and reality is reinforced in this composition by the juxtaposition of two styles. The elongated figures of the saints, the rather smooth painting of the broken folds of their garments, and the mannerist palette of Saint Clare’s garments suggest a date in the early seventeenth century. However, the figure of Christ is striking for its hard contours and pronounced musculature, probably reflecting the close study of a European engraving. The figure of Christ is deliberately shown at a different scale from the two other figures in order to emphasize its otherworldliness. The naturalistic landscape upon which the figures stand increases in drama behind the figure of Christ, where a vivid gold mandorla opens in a tempestuous, steel grey sky.

The large scale of this canvas suggests that it was painted for a Franciscan monastery or convent. The Franciscans in Lima commissioned the Italian artist resident there, Angelino Medoro, to paint a number of works for its house. As well, the order in Lima commissioned

several paintings by Medoro to be sent to the order in Santiago de Chile. Later in the century, the Franciscans in Cuzco commissioned a series about the life their founder to send to the Franciscans in Santiago, where there was a dearth of painters. We can be confident that the Thoma painting was a Franciscan commission, perhaps for a convent of *Clarisas*.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt