



2002.007

Unidentified Artist

Peru

*Ship of Patience*

Seventeenth century

Oil on canvas, 75 x 58 1/8 inches

The ship as allegory had a long history in European art, literature, and theological treatises and sermons from the Middle Ages onward. A famous example is Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools* (*Das Narrenschiff*, Basel, 1494). The ship as an allegory of the church (*Navis ecclesiae*) had particularly wide appeal and varied interpretations. Bartolomé Carrasco de Figueroa (1540-?), a native of the Canary Islands, described the ship in one of its incarnations as the ship of Saint Peter, the ship of the Apostles:

The Holy Church is a ship  
and God is the pilot,  
the Virgin a lantern that calms the sea;  
the gentle zephyr  
and pleasant south wind  
that is divine love fills the sails  
the mast is a high cross  
and the anchor, hope  
and the twelve argonauts,  
simple, cautious souls,  
go with the favor of heaven and faith

in the Holy Shepherd <sup>i</sup>

The Spanish dramatist Lope de Vega used the image of the ship of the church in his 1606 *El viaje del alma* (“The Journey of the Soul”) and, later in the century, his countryman and fellow dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca used ships in the staging of his “auto sacramental,” *La nave del Mercader* (“The Trader’s Ship”), performed in Madrid in 1674.

In art, the image of the church as *Navis mysticae contemplationis* was widely disseminated by an engraving of 1602 by Philippe Thomassin, and through modeled on it. A version that was probably created in Rome, but with an inscription in Castilian, “*Triumpho de la Fe y de la Ley de la Yglesia Cathólica . . .*”, was influential in Spain and America. It may be seen in versions in the Museo Parroquial de Daroca (Teruel) and in the refectory of the Colegio del Patriarca in Valencia, where it is titled *Nave mística y contemplativa*. In the Spanish colonies, there is a 1707 version by Melchor Pérez Holguín now in the Franciscan church in Potosí, and another in Mexico, in the Museo de Tepotzotlán, signed and dated by the painter Miguel Jiménez in 1687.<sup>ii</sup> Yet another visual and textual adaptation of an allegorical ship appears in an elaborate engraving in Melchor Prieto’s *Psalmodia Eucaristica* (Madrid, 1622), where the ship is interpreted from the perspective of Eucharistic symbolism.<sup>iii</sup>



Fig. 1 Gerhard Altzenbach (c. 1609-1672), *NAVIS PATIENTIAE/SCHIF DER GEDVLT*, engraving. Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg.

The composition of the Thoma painting is far simpler and more legible than any of the graphic versions mentioned above, perhaps reflecting its didactic purpose. The clergyman who may have commissioned the painting sought an image that would be easy for a presumably indigenous audience to “read,” and so selected as a model a seventeenth-century German print by Gerhard Altzenbach (fig. 1), or more likely a copy after it. The fiery breath of the demon at the upper left is no match for the “gentle zephyr” emanating from the putto on the left, inscribed “Volumprad [sic] de Dios” (the will/ grace of God). The sail, decorated, as is the banner aloft, with emblems from the Passion of Christ, fills with this breeze. The sail bears the inscription “Hope for eternal remuneration” (“Speransa de la Remuneracion eterna”). The ship’s passengers are clearly labeled: Saints Catherine, Joseph, Dionysius, and King David, Job and Tobias, as well as representatives of the four mendicant orders of the church. Saints

Cristina, Clement and Paul climb aboard. A skeleton armed with a crossbow takes aim, as the “Death of envy”, and the anchor that Tobias hauls aboard is inscribed: “Assurance in the promises of God”: “Certesa en las promesas de Dios.”

The composition of the Thoma painting is seen in reverse in a painting in the Monasterio de Santa Teresa in Arequipa, Peru (fig. 2). This exemplifies the long and changing lives of graphic sources. The originals served as the models for paintings, but so did counter-prints, and prints by other hands based on the European originals, all subject to varying degrees of change.



Fig. 2 Unidentified artist, *Ship of Patience*, oil on canvas. Monasterio de Santa Teresa, Arequipa.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

---

i Translated from “La nave de la Iglesia y su derrotero en la iconografía de los siglos XVI y XVII” by Gabriel Llopart, in Johannes Vincke, ed., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens* 15 (1970), 16.

ii Ibid., 21-22.

iii Melchor Prieto was Vicar General of the Mercedarian Order in Spain at the time his book was published in Madrid. He had spent some years in Peru and dedicated this volume to Ana de Borja, Princesa de Esquilache, who had been vicereine of Peru, so it is likely that his book was well known there. However, the elaborate engravings in the *Psalmodia Eucaristica* have nothing in common with the simple composition of this painting. See Ewald M. Vetter, *Die Kupferstiche zur Psalmodia Eucaristica des Melchor Prieto von 1622. Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft, Reihe 2, Bd. 15* (1972), 108-171.