



1997.016  
Joseph Antonio Jiménez  
*The Divine Shepherdess*  
Probably Peru, Cuzco  
Ca. 1780  
Oil on canvas, 61 1/8 x 38 1/4 inches

Signed lower right: "*Jph Antt<sup>o</sup> me<sup>f</sup>*" and "*Joseph Antonio Jimenez*"

The subject of this painting, the Virgin as holy shepherdess, was known in Spain from the early eighteenth century, but became much more widely pictured in Spanish America.<sup>i</sup> The image of Christ as the Good Shepherd dates back to the Catacombs of Rome; the image of his mother as the "Divine Shepherdess" follows the words of Saint Antonine (1389-1459): "Mary is the Good Shepherd who pastures the church with the blessed fruit of her womb."<sup>ii</sup> References may be found in a sixteenth-century Spanish sermon,<sup>iii</sup> and the cult received a strong impetus from the Capuchin monk Isidore of Sevilla (1662-1750) to whom the Virgin appeared in the

guise of a shepherdess in the year 1703. The Blessed Diego de Cádiz gave more than a thousand sermons about the “Divina Pastora” and founded a confraternity dedicated to her.<sup>iv</sup>

It is said that Isidore of Seville himself commissioned a painting of the subject from Miguel Alonso de Tovar and dictated the precise iconographical details: the Virgin Mary was to be shown in the center of the composition, seated on a rock under a tree.<sup>v</sup> She was to wear a red gown, blue mantle, a hat appropriate to a shepherdess, with her crook nearby. She should be pictured feeding roses to sheep (the roses representing the Rosary of their prayers to her). In the distance a sheep is chased by a wolf. When the sheep utters the words “Ave Maria” (expressed through a banderole emerging from its mouth), the Archangel Michael appears from the heavens with his shield and spear to kill the satanic creature.<sup>vi</sup> Sculptures, paintings, engravings, and medals offering the image of La Divina Pastora proliferated, and the cult spread rapidly.<sup>vii</sup>

This advocacy of the Virgin Mary was perfect for the Capuchins in the Americas. This missionary order of the Church was reinvented as a figurative shepherd who would gather in the infidels not yet part of the flock. The advocacy of “La Divina Pastora de las almas” (the holy shepherdess of souls), or the “Pastora Coronada” (the crowned shepherdess), played a key role in the strategy of conversion brought to Colombia and Venezuela by the Capuchins.<sup>viii</sup> The first church in the world dedicated to the Divina Pastora was built and inaugurated in 1745, with the express approval of King Philip V of Spain, on the road between Caracas and La Guaira.<sup>ix</sup> The devotion spread to Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, and a song dedicated to the “Corona de la Divina Pastora” was sung in the streets of many American cities, especially La Habana, Veracruz, Puebla, and Mexico City.<sup>x</sup>

In this painting, signed by an artist otherwise unknown, the sheep dutifully hold sprigs of roses in their mouths, as Isidore dictated, “symbolic of the Hail Mary with which they venerate her.”<sup>xi</sup> The narrative details usually found in paintings of this subject are entirely absent – no wolf, no frightened sheep, no avenging Archangel Michael. The Thoma painting offers an urbane interpretation of the theme that is aesthetically far from the frontier at which the Capuchins established themselves for the conversion of the Indians. Mary appears as is a sophisticated porcelain doll, elaborately dressed in brilliant red and blue with a plumed hat, her tunic and mantle embroidered in gold and edged with gold lace. Her flock is a balletic quartet of sloe-eyed sheep. The artist’s skill is shown to good effect in the brushy treatment of the flowers and his delicate handling of the gold *brocateado*. He has forced the gold lace and brocade to follow the shapes created by the folds in the Virgin’s garments, rather than simply sprinkling them over the surface with a stencil as often seen painting of the eighteenth-century Cuzco school.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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<sup>i</sup> In fact, the cult was suppressed in Seville for nearly a century after its first appearance there. See Jesús M. Palomero Páramo, “Entre el claustro y el compás,” in *Magna Hispalensis: el*

*universo de una iglesia*, exh. cat. (Seville: Santa Iglesia Catedral Metropolitana de Sevilla, 1992), 200-228.

ii P. Francisco Bacaicoa, “La Virgen como pastora,” *Archivo Español de Arte* 30, no. 119 (1957): 243.

iii Santiago Sebastián, in *El barroco iberoamericano: Mensaje iconográfico* (Madrid: Encuentros Ediciones, 1990), 220, quotes the sermon by the Blessed Juan de Avila (1499-1569): “Dichosas ovejas que tal pastora tenían y tal pasto recibían por medio de ella! Pastora, no jornalera que buscase su propio interés, pues que amaba tanto a las ovejas” (Fortunate sheep that had such a shepherdess and received such food from her. This Shepherdess was not a laborer who looked after her own interests, but a shepherdess because she so loved the sheep.)

iv Ibid.

v Tovar has always thus been closely associated with the subject. Like other Sevillian painters of the period, he probably created a number of versions of *La Divina Pastora*, but only two are known today—one in the parish church of Higuera de la Sierra, and another in the parish church of Cortelazor, which is signed and dated 1748. See Enrique Valdivieso, *Historia de la pintura sevillana. Siglos XIII al XX*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Seville: Guadalquivir, 1992), 302.

vi Palomero Páramo, “Entre el claustro,” 224-225.

vii The first engraving of the Divina Pastora was done in Rome in the eighteenth century by Angelo Testa after a drawing by Francisco Rodríguez. The engraver of the Casa de Moneda in Santa Fe de Bogotá, José Benito de Miranda, made a print of the image in 1782. Gustavo Vives Mejía, *Presencia del arte quiteño en Antioquia* (Medellín: Fondo Editorial, Universidad Eafit, 1998), 53.

viii Ibid., 39.

ix Ibid., 40.

x Sebastián de Ubrique, “Orígen y desarrollo de la devoción de La Divina Pastora en los pueblos de España y América,” in *Crónica Oficial del Congreso Mariano Hispano-Americano de Sevilla y de los actos complementarios del mismo celebrado del 15 al 21 de mayo de 1929* (Madrid: Imprenta Sáez Hermanos, 1930), 819.

xi Isidore’s prescription for the image is quoted by J. B. de Ardales, *La Divina Pastora y el Beato Diego de Cádiz* (Seville, 1949), here quoted from María Matilde Suárez and Carmen Bettencourt, *La Divina Pastora: Patrona de Barquisimeto* (Caracas: Fundación Bigott, 1996), 37.