



Unidentified artist  
*Coronation of Mary Immaculate by the Trinity*  
Peru, probably Cuzco  
18<sup>th</sup> century  
Oil on canvas, 62 ½ x 48 inches

The Virgin Mary is pictured in her doctrinal role as the Immaculate Conception, indicated by the presence of the crescent moon beneath her kneeling figure. She is crowned by the “anthropomorphic Trinity,” which is discussed in the object essays accompanying the paintings *The Trinity* and *Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity* in the Thoma collection.

It may be said that there are two realms in this composition, the heavenly one represented by the Trinity which is connected to the earthly realm by the figure of Mary Immaculate. The upper half of the painting follows a standard iconographical type of distant otherworldliness. The figures at the lower corners of the painting are, in contrast, painted quite naturalistically.

On the left is Saint Didacus of Alcalá, better known as San Diego de Alcalá. Didacus was born in San Nicolás in Andalucía, Spain, and is sometimes thus called Diego de San Nicolás. He was a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, sent to the Canary Islands to convert the infidels, and, sent to in Rome in 1450, where he was said to miraculously cure sufferers of an epidemic by merely making the sign of the cross over them. He was sanctified in 1588 by Pope Sixtus V, himself a Franciscan. The rose he holds in the painting reflects his “miracle of the roses,” a legend shared with a number of other saints. As a lay brother in Spain, Didacus stole bread from the refectory to give to the poor. Challenged while leaving the monastery, Didacus’s cloak opened to reveal, not bread, but roses.

On the right is Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, a member of the Order of Hermits of Saint Augustine who was canonized in 1446. The stars on his robe refer to the vision of a star that was said to lead him to Tolentino, where he spent much of his career. The small dish with birds refers to an account in which the saint was ill and his prior insisted he put his hand on the roast partridge that was brought to him to eat. Nicholas, a vegetarian, put his hand on the partridge, prayed over it, and the bird came to life and flew away.

Saint Nicholas of Tolentino was credited with numerous miracles and was invoked by devotees to the souls in Purgatory. In the Viceroyalty of Peru, the chronicler Antonio de la Calancha credited the saint with the permanent Spanish settlement in the harsh climate of Potosí, now Bolivia. Many babies there died in childbirth or soon thereafter until a man dedicated his expected child to Saint Nicholas. The child, born in 1598, lived to healthy adulthood and spurred many expectant parents to name their children Nicolás as well.<sup>1</sup>

The faces of the trinitarian figures and that of the Virgin Mary are conventional, but the fictive portraits of the two male saints are painted with considerable naturalism, distinguished in appearance one from the other. The patron of this work must have been named Nicolás, reflecting the names of the saint of Tolentino, Italy and the one born in Spain in San Nicolás.

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio de la Calancha, *Crónica moralizada del Orden de San Agustín en el Perú* (Barcelona: P. Lacavalleria, 1639), p. 750.