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Unidentified Artist

Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity

Cuzco, Peru

18th century

Oil and gold on canvas

At the center of this work, the Virgin kneels as the three members of the Holy Trinity place a crown on her head. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), identifiable by his attributes the flaming heart, bishop's crosier, and pectoral cross, occupies the bottom right corner. Augustine's inclusion here may well be related to his treatise *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*), though lesser known than his other writings including the *Confessions* and *City of God*. In the bottom left we find Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274) here generically rendered here as a tonsured, older man in cardinal's vestments writing in a book. Bonaventure was one of the most significant Doctors of the Church and an important medieval philosopher whose writings were influenced significantly by Augustine. Like Augustine, he also expounded on the nature of the triune God in his *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (c. 1254/55).[1]

The doctrine of the Trinity originates in an episode in the book of Genesis known as the Hospitality of Abraham or the Theophany of Mamre: "The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him" (Genesis 18:1-2). Recognizing the three men as God, Abraham offered his guests hospitality and in return they announced the birth of his son Isaac. Biblical exegetes interpreted the episode as a prefiguration and proof of the triune god, with Augustine writing in Chapter 11 of his treatise that "since three men appeared, and no one of them is said to be greater than the rest either in form, or age, or power, why should we not here understand, as visibly intimated by the visible creature, the equity of the Trinity, and one and the same substance in three persons?"[2] This hermeneutical interpretation forms the basis for the depiction of the Trinity as three identical figures.

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[1] While not Bonaventure's only exegesis on this subject, the *Disputed Questions* is generally thought to be his most developed thinking on the subject.

[2] *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. A New Translation*, vol. 7 On the Trinity, ed. Marcos Dods (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 63.

Images of what is variously known as the identical, anthropomorphic, or Christomorphic Holy Trinity are found across the Spanish viceroyalties and proliferated primarily in the 17th and 18th centuries.[3] In some versions of the anthropomorphic Trinity, the three figures are distinguished by emblems on their chests (typically a lamb, sun, and dove). In this version Christ can be differentiated as the figure at the left by the wounds in his hand and foot. The Holy Spirit sits at center and on the right, identifiable by the scepter he bears, is God the Father.

Particularly notable in this work is the extremely fine gold detailing (*brocateado*) present on the vestments of the Virgin and cloak of St. Augustine. This goldwork is also found in the robes of the Trinity along with finely rendered lace at the cuffs and hems. In addition to the *brocateado*, the blue and red tones and mauve heavens link the work to the workshops of 18th century Cuzco.

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[3] See María del Consuelo Maquivar, *De lo permitido a lo prohibido: Iconografía de la Santísima Trinidad en la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa/ INAH, 2006).