



2023.62

Unidentified artist

Saint Vincent Ferrer, 18th century

Cuzco

Oil on canvas, 43 x 57 inches

Collection of the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 2023.62

Saint Vincent Ferrer (c. 1350–1419), a Dominican friar from Valencia, Spain, was one of the most compelling figures of the late medieval and early modern Catholic world. Canonized in 1455, Ferrer’s image and message evolved significantly from the 15th through the 18th centuries, shaped by theological shifts, Counter-Reformation priorities, and local devotions across the Spanish empire.

Following his visionary ecstasy in 1398, Ferrer embraced a life of itinerant preaching across Europe, warning of the imminence of the Last Judgment. His self-identification as a “Legate of Christ” and as the angel of Revelation, in charge with announcing the end of days, formed the basis of his spiritual fame.¹ Early iconography, particularly from the mid-15th century, shows Ferrer as a Dominican friar, often with a double halo, a book and crucifix, or even holding a church, symbolizing his apostolic mission (Fig. 1).² However, the more enduring iconographic formulation would emerge later: Ferrer as the apocalyptic angel, complete with wings and trumpet, raising his index finger toward the sky in warning of Christ’s impending return.

Within this iconographic framework, Saint Vincent Ferrer is portrayed in the Thoma painting as a Dominican friar—tonsured, bearded, and clad in the traditional black and white habit, with a rosary hanging from his waist. At his feet lie a bishop’s miter and a cardinal’s hat, symbols of the high ecclesiastical honors he humbly declined during his lifetime. On the table to his right rests an inkwell and a book, likely referencing the phrase from Revelation 14:7 commonly associated with his image: *Timete Deum et date illi honorem quia venit hora iudicii eius* (Fear God, and give him honor, for the hour of his judgment is at hand). Cited by Vincent himself in a 1412 letter to Pope Benedict XIII and reiterated in both his canonization bull and liturgical Office, this verse affirms his identity as the angel of the apocalypse.³

¹ Óscar Calvé Mascarell, “Vincent Ferrer’s Vision: Oral Traditions, Texts and Imagery,” *Religions* 13: 940 (2022): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100940>. On the construction of the literary and visual image of Saint Vincent Ferrer during the 15th century, see: Óscar Calvé Mascarell, *La configuración de la imagen de San Vicente Ferrer en el Siglo XV*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Valencia, 2016.

² Henri D. Saffrey, “Les images populaires de Saints dominicains à Venise au XV siècle et l’édition par Alde Manuce des Epistole de sainte Cathérine de Sienne,” *Humanisme et imagerie aux XVe et XVIe siècles. Études iconologiques et bibliographiques* (Paris: Vrin, 2003): 37.

³ Laura Ackerman Smoller, *The Saint and the Chopped-up Baby. The Cult of Vincent Ferrer in Medieval & Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014): 241.

This iconographic model became firmly established in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, shaped in part by the post-Tridentine Church's emphasis on saints as militant agents of spiritual renewal. Prints by artists such as Balthasar Thomas Moncornet (1630-1716) highlight Ferrer's asceticism and emphasize his defining attributes, most notably the trumpet and wings, that visually connect him to the apocalyptic angel of Revelation (Fig. 2). Although numerous Spanish hagiographies about Ferrer were published throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, relatively few illustrated series of his life were produced.⁴ One notable exception is Jean IV Leclerc's set of 18 engravings, *Vita et miracula S. Vicentii Ferrerii*, printed in Paris in 1612 (Fig. 3). Meanwhile, standalone prints portraying the winged Ferrer began to circulate more widely across Europe in the late 17th century (Fig. 4). Across the Atlantic, the Dominican Order and ecclesiastical authorities actively promoted this imagery in the Americas, reinforcing Ferrer's urgent theological message and aligning it with broader efforts to revitalize Catholic visual culture in response to Protestant iconoclasm.

The Dominican Order played a foundational role in the spiritual and cultural life of colonial Peru. From the earliest days of the conquest, figures such as Vicente de Valverde, Pizarro's companion and the first bishop of Cuzco, helped establish a lasting Dominican presence in the Andes. The Qorikancha, the former Inca Temple of the Sun, was transformed into the Dominican convent of Santo Domingo, symbolizing both the triumph of Christianity and the close integration of the order into the colonial enterprise. By the mid-17th century, the Dominicans in Cuzco began actively promoting the cult of Saint Vincent Ferrer, leading to the production of several local representations of the saint (Fig. 5). The figure of Ferrer in the Thoma painting likely dates to the early 18th century, as indicated by the use of *brocateado*—the gold leaf stars adorning his black habit that mimic the decorative details of textiles found on polychrome sculpture. Notably, while the figure of the saint is painted with restraint, the

⁴ During the 17th and 18th centuries, five hagiographies of Saint Vincent Ferrer were published in Spanish. Fray Francisco Diago, *Historia de la vida, milagros, muerte y discipulos del bienaventurado predicador apostólico Valenciano S. Vicente Ferrer de la Orden de Predicadores* (Barcelona: Imprenta de Gabriel Graellsy, 1600); Fray Francisco Gavaldá, *Vida de el Ángel profeta y apóstol Valenciano san Vicente Ferrer* (Valencia: Gerónimo Vilagrassa, 1668); Fray Andrés Ferrer de Valdecebro, *Historia de la vida maravillosa y admirable del segundo Pablo de San Vicente Ferrer* (Madrid: Matheo de Llanos, 1682); Francisco Vidal y Micó, *Historia de la portentosa vida y milagros del Valenciano apóstol de Europa S. Vicente Ferrer* (Valencia: Oficina de Joseph Estevan Dolz, 1735); Miguel Ramón y Ribera, *Portentosa vida de el apóstol de la Europa San Vicente Ferrer* (Barcelona: Imprenta de Eulalia Piferrer, 1777).

landscape visible through the window reveals a more animated and expressive brushwork, suggesting a heightened attention to nature.

While Ferrer's role as a militant preacher and angel of the Last Judgment inspired early missionaries and artists, by the 18th century his image in the Andes had evolved. He came to be venerated primarily as a miracle worker and intercessor, a transformation that reflects a broader pastoral shift from doctrinal instruction to addressing everyday concerns, such as the Andean epidemic that struck Cuzco in the 1720s.⁵ During this period, not only did novenas dedicated to the saint proliferated in Peru,⁶ testifying to his perceived power in offering supernatural aid, but elaborate narrative cycles also emerged, depicting his life and miracles. One such example is the series of twenty paintings that decorate the *sotocoro* of the Church of Santo Domingo in Cuzco, which portray Ferrer halting plagues, resurrecting the dead, and healing the sick. These scenes unfold within an urban Andean setting that subtly echoes the social life of 18th-century Cuzco (Figs. 6-7).⁷

The iconographic and devotional evolution of Saint Vincent Ferrer reveals the dynamic processes by which sanctity was localized in the Spanish Americas. The militant angel of Revelation who thundered against sin became, in Cuzco, a heavenly protector who defended the city from plagues and interceded for the faithful in times of distress. While European prints and texts emphasized Ferrer's eschatological mission, Andean artists and clergy embraced a more affective and pragmatic vision of the saint—one that merged Dominican orthodoxy with the emotional and devotional realities of 18th-century life.

Verónica Muñoz-Nájjar

⁵ For more information about the 1720 epidemic in the Andes, see: Gabriela Ramos, *El cuerpo en palabras: estudios sobre religión, salud y humanidad en los Andes coloniales* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2020): 119-139

⁶ *Novena de el Ángel de el Apocalipsis, Apóstol de la Europa, y gloria de la Religión Guzman, el Esclarecido S. Vicente Ferrer milagro de los Milagros, y universal consuelo de todos los necesitados y afligidos* (Lima: Con licencia, 1724)

⁷ José de Mesa y Teresa Gisbert, *Historia de la Pintura Cuzqueña*, t. 1 (Lima: Fundación Augusto N. Wiese, Banco Wiese Ltda, 1982): p. 215.



Fig. 1. Unidentified Artist, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, Venice, 1455-1460. Engraving no. 24 of the Rubieri Collection. Biblioteca Classense, Rávena.



Fig. 2. Balthasar Thomas Moncornet, *S. Vincentivs Ferrerivs*, 1672-1677.



Fig. 3. Jean IV Leclerc, *Frontispiece Vita et Miracula S. Vincentii Ferrerii*, 1612.



Fig. 4. Engraving of Saint Vincent Ferrer flying over Turia by Quesádez. Included in Josep Llop, *De la institucio, govern polítich y juridich, obseruancies, costums, rentes y obligacions dels oficials de les Ills. Fabriques vella dita de Murs e Valls y noua dita del Riu de la insigne, leal y coronada Ciutat de Valencia*, 1675. Biblioteca Valenciana Nicolau Primitiu, Fondo Manuel Bas Carbonell (XVII/890)



Fig. 5. Unidentified Artist, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, late 17th century. Templo de Andahuaylillas, Cuzco.



Figs. 6-7. Unidentified Artist, *Life and Miracles of Saint Vincent Ferrer*, ca. 1720. Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Cuzco. Photographs by Vadim Zignago del Pino.