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Degeneracija imperijalne istine u vjersku dogmu u *Warhammeru 40.000*

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Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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Abstract

The universe of *Warhammer 40,000* fosters one of the most draconian forms of humanity in all of fiction. This zealously religious Imperium of Mankind is defined by xenophobia and hatred, with all of its planets exporting millions of men, women, and children to sustain the countless war efforts across its myriad battlefields. The ruler of this Imperium is the titular God-Emperor of Mankind, one venerated by every single loyal Imperial citizen; anything less is met with death or worse. This religion-obsessed faction has its roots in the exact opposite, in the aspirations of a truly superhuman individual who despised religion and superstition above all else and endeavored to cut humanity off from it. Yet, the very nature of this individual, as well as the influence of larger forces in the galaxy, would lead his life's work to a dark perversion of his original intentions. This paper will examine how the secular intentions turned into religious zealotry in *Warhammer 40,000* novels and stories with the help of Nietzsche's philosophical texts and contemporary understandings of authoritarian and totalitarian states.

Keywords: *Warhammer 40,000*, the Emperor, superhuman, religion, Warp, brotherhood, myth, worship, heresy

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Introduction

The desire for understanding has long been the driving force behind most of human achievement. That understanding, however, is not easily gained. Not every event can be easily explained, and the means to change are not always available. Mankind has always strived towards understanding, seeking for a broader meaning to life and the world. Some never concern themselves with such matters and just live their lives accordingly. Some seek understanding through amassing knowledge, some through community, and so on. Yet, no matter how much knowledge man accumulates, there will never be a definite point where everything lays bare before him. There will always be something just out of reach, something than cannot be understood. That is why religion can have a foothold in the heart of humanity. No matter what one does, there will always be something missing, something that signifies that there is a force above humanity. Because of that people can find solace in their religions and meaning where they otherwise would not be able to, and face those doubts as a community.

The world of *Warhammer 40,000* shows us the efforts of a man known only as the Emperor who saw religion as nothing short of a deficiency borne out of the fear of the unknown. Faced with unexplainable phenomena, the human imagination endeavours to fill in the blanks with whatever is plausible to create a stable world view. This deception, he found, was fueling an all too real a threat to mankind, so he set out on a mission to eradicate all religion and superstition from humanity, in order to save it from this dire threat. Yet, his efforts would serve to undermine his own ambitions in the end.

This thesis explores the transformation of a secular, scientific principle into a repressive, dogmatic cult in the *Warhammer 40,000* setting through the novels: *Master of Mankind: War in the Webway* and *The First Heretic* written by Aaron Dembski-Bowden, *Horus Rising* by Dan Abnett, *Gate of Bones* by Andy Clark, *Mark of Faith* by Rachel Harrisson, *Faith and Fire* by James Swallow, *Lorgar: The Bearer of the Word and The First Wall* by Gav Thrope and the short story "The Last Church" by Graham McNeill. It also discusses the unavoidable link man has to the metaphysical. The first chapter will analyze the Emperor himself, how and why he formed his Imperial Truth as well as his methods, comparing them to Nietzsche's notion of an apex human. The second chapter will focus on the factors that led to the degradation of the Emperor's vision. The third chapter will discuss the Imperium of Mankind as most know it – a zealously religious empire venerating the Emperor as a god.

1. A Short History and Explanation of the *Warhammer 40,000* Setting

Warhammer 40,000 is a table-top miniature-based war game owned by Games Workshop. Its history began with its predecessor as well as sister franchise: *Warhammer Fantasy*. It was originally just a line of fantasy miniatures sold simply for collection purposes. Most people would just buy a few miniatures, usually to represent their characters in *Dungeons & Dragons* sessions, then stop there. In order to boost sales, Games Workshop hired Rick Priestly to help establish a war game based around the fantasy miniatures. The fantasy war game was wildly successful and before long there were plans to create a sister game that would cater to sci-fi fans. Since then the franchise has grown massively successful, with multiple editions, video games, and novels all focusing around its universe and introducing more people to the grim-dark universe.

The setting of *Warhammer 40,000* is succinctly described by the words "never ending war." It is a setting that is purposefully bleak and hopeless because humanity is constantly beset by forces both alien and daemonic. This is, however, not the story of a fledgling but heroic nation trying to make the universe a better place as the Imperium of Man is a massive intergalactic empire held together by legions of bureaucrats and clergy. The Imperial Cult venerating the Emperor as a god is absolute, and any suspicion of heresy is treated severely and permanently. Deviant men and women are either killed or lobotomised into servitude, entire worlds are deemed unsalvageable and exterminated, and the greatest honour that one can find is to serve and die in the Emperor's name. The Imperium's main force is the Astra Militarum, also known as the Imperial Guard, consisting of untold billions of men and women fighting on thousands of battlefields across the entire universe. The Imperium's elite soldiers, the Adeptus Astartes, also known as the Space Marines, are genetically altered superhuman warriors, the creation of which is a grueling process of surgery that few survive. Above them stand the Adeptus Custodes, the Custodians, the Emperor's personal guard. The Ecclesiarchy, the main church of mankind, fields its own Adepta Sororitas, also known as the Sisters of Battle, to wage war. The imperial Inquisition exists to police all of them, vigilant for any threat to the Imperium. The cooperation with other races of the universe happens on occasion, but it is always exclusively pragmatic. Both sides know there is no true camaraderie between them, disbanding the fragile alliance the moment it is no longer necessary. While this description might make it seem as if the Imperium is the titular villainous faction, it is not. No race in the universe is any less heroic than the Imperium and the universe hides far greater dangers than simple intergalactic warfare.

The Immaterium, also known as the Warp, is a separate dimension spanning all of existence. It is a place where reality shifts and turns, sometimes in understandable ways and sometimes in unexpected ones, but always unfathomable. This dimension is the source of all psychic energy in the universe, and it can also be used to travel in an instant. The Warp is not a benign place as it is home to the Chaos gods, four immensely powerful entities that feed off of the actions and thoughts of sentient species. Any interaction with the Warp makes the user susceptible of falling prey to the machinations of these entities and their minions. Because of that, the Imperium of Man heavily sanctions the use of these powers. These users, known as psykers, are regulated and controlled, ready to be executed at the suspicion of daemonic possession. The Imperium is, however, seldom successful in stopping the Chaos Taint and many from its ranks fall prey to Chaos and turn traitor. The greatest event of this setting, the Horus Heresy, is a massive civil war that ended with the total corruption of half of all imperial forces and the fatal wounding of the Emperor, who had to entomb himself upon the Golden Throne, which is the only thing keeping him alive. In the thousands of years that followed, mankind has lost much of its knowledge, and many systems that are in place are failing, the knowledge to maintain them lost forever. Humanity is a force living on past knowledge that it no longer fully understands in a universe fraught with dangers within and without.

2. The Truth Lost to Time

The Imperium is ruled by the god Emperor of Mankind; he rules humanity entombed upon a life support system known as the Golden Throne. From this throne he protects his people, the loyal subjects of the Imperium, from threats. This protection is both literal, as the Emperor is the greatest psyker known to man and can influence certain events if need calls for it, as well as figurative, for he is god and absolute master of mankind, his subjects are protected from the predations of the Warp as long as they remain faithful. Tributes are paid to him both literally and figuratively, the most infamous being the psyker tithe, meaning that thousands of psykers have been sacrificed daily to the Emperor on the Golden Throne. While done with reverence and faith, these acts are in reality done because of a completely secular need, the need to keep the Golden Throne running so the Emperor does not die.

This dissonance between what Imperial subjects believe and why in reality these actions are done is a common occurrence in the Imperium. What the Imperial cult preaches as the absolute truth is far removed from the original state of affairs. That occurs because the Emperor's original vision was a solely secular one. The true Imperial truth rejected all forms of religion and superstition, enforcing instead rationality and science. In the Emperor's original Imperium, there was no place for gods and spirits, only man and man specifically. The human race was destined to rule the stars, for aliens had their own empires, which they let crumble, or were never advanced enough to establish any. Only man has the right to rule the stars, and he would do so through reason and logic. Over the centuries, this truth ended up all but forgotten, for the Emperor's own methods left much to be desired, and other forces used that to shatter his well-meaning but flawed vision.

This focus on rationality and harsh severance from religion bears many similarities to the Enlightenment period, echoing its mission in an excessive and bloody way. The desire to unite mankind through logic and science in order to create a utopia free of discrimination and hatred borne out of superstition was the Emperor's very mission and he carried it out in a violent and absolute way to create a utopia.

2.1. The Imperial Truth and the Emperor's Vision

The Imperium of Man did not start as the heavily religious regime most people know it; in fact, it started as something very different. The man who would be known as the Emperor of Mankind is arguably the most enigmatic figure in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe. He displays immense feats of both physical and psychic strength, yet never claims to be anything more than a man. This conflict of ideas has served as a key element in the Emperor mystery. He is seemingly all powerful and all knowing, yet firmly planted in his own recognition of himself as a human.

His very origins are shrouded in mystery, explained in the tales that always seem to be skewed to some degree by the monumental awe the Emperor inspires in those who meet him. The only fully known fact about the Emperor's life is that nobody actually knows anything about him for certain. Despite that, there are multiple stories about him that, if nothing else, serve to better explain the rationale behind the Emperor's actions by offering glimpses into his mindset. One of these stories is a personal account by the Emperor, told to one of his custodians. According to it, the Emperor was born and grew up in a primitive tribe of the BC-era Earth. Even during these early childhood years, the Emperor is given monumental importance for the humanity as a whole. In a flashback of the Emperor's early life during *Master of Mankind: War in the Webway*, the readers learn that the Emperor's uncle murdered his father. After practicing the due burial rites of his tribe, the Emperor exercises his already great power and executes his uncle for his crime by inducing a heart attack. This is, however, not an act of passion or righteous fury; it was done with very little emotion at all: "[t]he boy who would be king watched with neither remorse nor any particular hostility" (Dembski-Bowden, *Master of Mankind* ch.2). The execution of the would-be Emperor's uncle is described as an act of justice itself. According to the Emperor, in the coming centuries, many cultures would take up the concept and make it a key part of their core values. The Emperor, through an act confined solely to his tribe, has purposefully influenced the development of humanity in its entirety:

> I speak of kings. Givers of law, rulers of cultures. Not merely those who give orders, but those whose decisions keep a civilisation bound together. This was the night I realised that mankind must be ruled. It could not be trusted to thrive without a master. It needed to be guided and shaped, bound by laws and set to follow the course laid by its wisest minds. (Dembski-Bowden, *Master of Mankind* ch.2)

The mythical proportions of his character allow no shallow notions such as pride or insecurity, merely the actions of an individual who understands his own power and intelligence.

In the centuries following this event, mankind advanced on Earth, reaching the point of space travel and proliferating among the stars during a period known as the Age of Technology. It was during this time that humanity first came in contact with the forces of the Warp, the existence of psykers enabling much more effective space travel. The Emperor's actions during this period are not so well known, but it is more than probable that he had been preparing for the upcoming trials of humanity. The entire universe would soon become cloaked in massive Warp storms, fracturing humanity completely and bringing about an era known as the Long Night. While during the Age of Technology humanity benefitted from and relied on inter-planetary trade and commerce, the advent of the Long Night took all of that away. Every single planet inhabited by humans was cut off, remaining isolated in the universe, and at constant risk of strange new forces.

The term Earth had been mostly abandoned by this point, Terra being used instead. Such a name change was apt, considering that Terra was massively different from what was known as Earth. What was once a bountiful planet that fostered a young and ambitious race, now became resource starved planet. Terra is also war-torn, as tribal countries of techno-barbarians wage war upon each other for whatever could be found on the Warp-storm-isolated planet.

It was on this hopeless hellscape that the Emperor put his plans for united humanity into motion. Fully aware of the Warp storms that would engulf all of mankind, the Emperor created an army of warriors he would use to unite Terra. These Thunder Warriors were reminiscent of what the universe would know as the Adeptus Astartes or the Space Marines, and to a degree they were. Both existed solely to advance the Emperor's goals, to be the arbiters of his will, and to wage war in his name. Yet, the Space Marines also had another role, to be the shield of humanity, one for which the Thunder Warriors were much too violent. Even though violence remained a key aspect of the Imperium, both past and present, these warriors were particularly bloodthirsty. Their role was to fight, kill, and die on a war-torn world for a greater cause; they were violent and bloodthirsty because they had to be, because that was the cost of victory on the war-torn Terra. Alongside the Thunder Warriors, the Emperor had his ever-faithful Custodians, who, unlike the Thunder Warriors, were unstable due to the recent genetic modifications the Emperor would master with the creation of the Adeptus Astartes; the Adeptus Custodes were his personal guard even during the time of the Unification Wars. Each hand-crafted to be a perfect soldier, bred for battle yet not erratic like the comparatively haphazardly engineered Thunder Warriors.

With these forces, the Emperor struck out across Terra, bringing all to heel, unifying the planet. Unification, however, was never his only goal. In humanity the Emperor saw an insidious cancer, one that could doom the entire race to whims of the Warp if not quelled. That imminent danger was religion:

> "Superstition and ignorance always attract the warp's denizens," continued the Emperor. "For the core of religion is the twinned principle of arrogance and fear. Fear of oblivion. Fear of an unfair life and an arbitrary universe. Fear of there simply being nothing, no great and grand scheme to existence. The fear, ultimately, of being powerless." (Dembski-Bowden, *Master of Mankind* ch.6)

All throughout the Unification Wars, the Emperor made it his goal to purge all religion from the face of mankind, claiming that peace could only be achieved when the skull of the last preacher is crushed by the last stone of the last church. He did achieve his goal on Terra, with the destruction of the very last church on the planet. His vision for a secular humanity free from the grasp of religion was one stop closer.

This hatred of religion is a very important point in the Emperor's master plan, for it did not exist solely out of principle. Religion, to the Emperor, posed a very tangible threat to mankind, beyond the wars and schisms it could cause. This was because the Emperor was aware of the Immaterium and the dangers it held for his race. This separate dimension, its many mysteries and dangers existing just beneath all of reality, were finely attuned to the minds of sentient species. Within it, great and terrible powers surged, each bringing out the worst of any sentient mind, encouraging and growing stronger off of heinous deeds. Even though the Emperor was the mightiest psyker mankind would ever know, he never wanted mankind to be at the whims of these foul gods and their minions and sought to separate humanity from their influence. Yet, these entities fed on excess: the excess of bloodshed, pleasure, ambition or even apathy. To entities like this, religion was a shining beacon, a guiding force to grant them ingress into the worlds and minds of men, and to tear them all inside out. Unifying mankind and saving it from the Warp would be nigh impossible with the existence of religion. Because of these reasons, religion could not be allowed to exist, not out of simple principle but dire need.

Another fact the Emperor would have to deal with was that his own forces, while more disciplined and trained than most of what Terra had to offer, were still erratic, unpredictable, and not fit to serve as soldiers of a star-spanning highly organized Imperium he envisioned. The Emperor always knew the Thunder Warriors were too unstable for his planned conquest of the

Universe, they were simply means to an end, a way to unify and ensure Terra's advancement while he worked on their superior successors. They were never meant to survive the Unification Wars, naught for lack of devotion, but rather their leader's lack of necessity beyond the bloody work they did. They might have been violent and unstable, but everything they underwent, every murder they committed, they did out of loyalty to the Emperor and the belief in the better world he would create. What they never could have known is that the Emperor never intended for them to witness this better world. He never once tried to replenish their numbers, and by the time the Emperor put his plans of universal conquest into motion, all of them were conveniently gone. It is said they all died valiantly in the Emperor's service during one of the final battles of the Unification wars, but the truth is likely much darker, with the possibility that the Emperor himself ordered their deaths, carried out by his personal guard, the Custodians, and the newly created legions of warriors meant to replace them, the Adeptus Astartes, also known as the Space Marines.

These two aspects serve as the foundation upon which the Emperor's original vision was formed. He had the abilities and intelligence to anticipate massive dangers humanity never even knew existed. He knew how to impose law and rally people to his cause, folding them into his armies and modifying them for his needs. He was highly principled and would not stop in the pursuit of his goals. Finally, he was pragmatic enough to commit heinous deeds, both against those who opposed him and against his own troops. Finally, what cements the Emperor's nature as truly outstandingly strange, is that none of these acts were performed out of selfish whims or zealous rage. For all the heinous deeds the Emperor committed, all of them were genuinely intended to further advance and safeguard humanity; as the Emperor's knowledge, capability, and ambition were so far ahead of any human past, present or future, it simply pushed him a step above all of humanity. Humanity was destined to rule the stars, and the Emperor would see it happen:

> "Doesn't that make you no better than the holy men you were telling me about?" "The difference is I know I am right," said the Emperor. "Spoken like a true autocrat." The Emperor shook his head. "You misunderstand, Uriah. I have seen the narrow survival path that is all that stands between humanity and extinction, and this is the way it must begin." (McNeill)

This in turn would create a degree of separation between him and his subjects, a rift that would only widen in time, and engulf all of his goals in shadow.

2.2. Mankind's Manifest Destiny and the Notion of an Apex Human

The notion that mankind can and should subjugate others is not an alien one, as it has been the origin for many acts of violence committed over the course of history. During the Enlightenment, mankind sought to unite the world under the flag of reason and secularism, which would in itself be fine, but it had an unfortunate side-effect of creating the notion that humanity should unite both the natural and the man-made world, and that man should be the arbiter of the world's progression. While humanity may be the only species capable of sentience and higher thought, it by no means follows that humanity knows what should be done with the world. Sadly, among all the good things the Enlightenment did for humanity, it led to the conclusion that nature is here for the rational man to take advantage of:

> Jacques Derrida maintains that the West is duped by its concept of reason, which deludes us into believing that we can achieve a pure communion with the world. This rational certitude is tyrannical; it exudes everything that is unsure or at variance with itself. (Haydn 30)

The liberation of man from ignorance, together with the unfortunate reality that mankind now saw itself as the rightful ruler of nature, was an issue very appropriately exemplified in the era of American pioneers. During this time, settlers were moving across the American continent, claiming land and civilizing it, making what was once inhospitable and wild a beacon of human ingenuity. This was the story pioneering presented itself with; however, in recent years this has been greatly disputed, in great part because of the settlers' treatment of Native Americans. The European settlers claimed that the Native Americans were a savage people that could not reconcile their ways with that of the superior civilization offered to them, a people that, despite the best efforts of the settlers, responded with violence when faced with a challenge to their ways. Unfortunately, the truth of the matter was inverted. It is common knowledge today that the Native Americans responded with curiosity and generosity when first interacting with the settlers, offering help and food, and only turned violent when the exploitative nature of the settlers became apparent. Since the Native Americans were situated on land the settlers craved, and were advanced enough as a civilization to resist attempts of assimilation, violence was the only answer they could muster. This led to an era of misery for the Native Americans, who were being pushed farther and farther from their homes in migration waves that killed many of them, and during which the settlers kept praising these efforts as just and proper in their works. These efforts "were predicated on the assumptions that whites were entitled to western lands, that white

settlement was inevitable, that justice was on the side of the whites, and that whites were peaceful while native Americans were warlike" (Baigell 6).

The basis of the Imperium of *Warhammer 40,000* echoes these notions perfectly, but it does so overtly. There is no hiding of the atrocities the Emperor commits in the name of his vision. Humanity is fractured and in need of guidance; religion is an unacceptable cancer in the heart of mankind; all will be brought to kneel before his ways or be put to death. All of these actions are fair and just because the Emperor wills it, because he is enlightened and has seen the future humanity will face. Even with the facts that in this universe religion does present an immense danger, and that the Emperor truly is superhuman in his knowledge and power, and that his methods truly do have justifiable merits in this horrible universe, the story not once presents anyone in the Imperium as good. The stories might be written from the point of view of loyal servants of the Imperium, but the atrocities are never hidden from the reader, unless it is for the purpose of a twist when they are only contextualized. The Imperium is a horrible place in a horrible universe, where hope is in the perpetual state of almost-depleted. This is the main narrative hook of the *Warhammer 40,000* setting, and the Imperium is at the centre of it. It is the story of uncaring, unflinching humanity, in a universe that matches that callousness, and while the particular individuals in this story might have aspirations or better intentions, the broader picture will never change.

The Emperor's state as an immensely powerful being that guides humanity and loathes religion bears many similarities to Nietzsche's notion of the apex human, but brought to a radicalized and excessive degree. Whereas Nietzsche's apex human is supposed to be the end result of enlightenment for every human, coming to a realisation that their life is worth living and that God is dead only because there is no need for it as it shackles progress and joy, the Emperor is a massive perversion of these tenets. He is an apex human in the literal sense, possessing knowledge and power that is his simply by virtue of him being the Emperor; he is a mythic figure, a literal Messiah that arrived to lift humanity from their cruel fate, and the very opposite of Nietzsche's critique of humanity relying on messianic figures. The fact the Emperor wanted to abolish religion and claimed he was just a powerful human mattered little when he forcibly instated himself as the arbiter of mankind's salvation. The advancement of every human is radicalized by being taken literally, cybernetic enhancement and gene engineering being staples of the Emperor's actions, the actions that look to the benefit of mankind, but not the benefit of the humans serving him.

Nietzsche's writings have a very adversarial tone, his opposition to the values of Christianity was a war for him. He used many figurative phrases to describe his path to free humanity from the hubris of dogmatic apathy: "I do not recommend work to you, but struggle instead. I do not recommend peace to you, but victory instead. Your work shall be a struggle, your peace shall be a victory!. . . You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I tell you: it is the good war that hallows any cause" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 33). These words, which represent a battle of knowledge, a war of ideas, a struggle to fight for humanity's values and ability to stand on principle, are almost comical when echoed by the Imperium. The Emperor despises any and all superstitious reasoning behind any action, be it war or debate. He may have had good intentions for humanity, but he was almost clinical in his execution of his conquests, his ways were good precisely because his methods were, his war was just because he waged it well, not in service of some God.

2.3. The Wayward Sons and the Beginning of Hypocrisy

Having established a foothold over Terra itself, the Emperor began to set his plans for the conquest of the universe into motion. His newly trained warriors were ready to carry out his will across the stars, but one thing was missing.

When the Emperor was designing the Adeptus Astartes, he knew he could not treat every single one like one of his Custodians. So instead, the Emperor used every single method at his disposal and crafted special warriors. Men who would be even more intricately designed than the Custodians, who would carry his own DNA, the Primarchs. These twenty[1] Primarchs served as genetic templates upon which the Space Marines were created, granting the Emperor's warriors the stability needed that the inferiorly modified Thunder Warriors lacked. Each of the Primarchs had his own legion modelled after him, and they would serve as the generals of the armies of Man, crossing the stars with the Emperor at their head, ready to retake the universe in the name of humanity.

The creation of these Primarchs was, however, not a simple affair for the Emperor. Despite the fact that the Emperor's intelligence and ingenuity were superhuman to say the least, he needed more to craft the Primarchs. To do that, the Emperor relied on the Warp. Now, this act, like all

[1] Twenty primarchs were created but two of them are treated as a complete mystery in lore, nobody knows who they were or why all knowledge of them was wiped, they are mentioned only vaguely.

others, was calculated by the Emperor to give humanity the greatest chance of survival; the fact that he would rely on the Warp meant that the entities' interest was even further raised. Yet, even with these actions, the Emperor was still plotting to separate humanity from these powers in the Warp. The forces of Chaos would not simply stand by as the Emperor laboured against them. Even though the Galaxy was rife with races, wars and intrigue beyond humanity to satisfy them, humanity was a particularly delectable prize for the Chaos gods. To that end, a massive Warp storm engulfed the labs of Terra where the Emperor's progeny was held, and scattered them across the entire universe, depriving the Emperor of his generals, and the legions of their leaders. The infant Primarchs scattered across the universe would arrive at different planets, their genetic makeup accelerating their growth, and earning each of them some sort of fame and influence on each of their worlds.

That, however, did not deter the Emperor; the Great Crusade would commence as he would now seek out and reclaim his wayward sons together with the universe. The first to be reclaimed would be Horus Lupercal who, like all the Primarchs after him, immediately recognized the Emperor as his father, and pledged his, as well as his followers, allegiance to the Lord of Mankind. He would welcome them and their planets into the fold, and reunite them with their legions, as well as welcome anybody from their time spent growing up who wanted to join the legions. In that way, these planets were assimilated into the Imperium, their cultures and practices set into the mold of the Imperial Truth.

The reclamation of the Primarchs already gives us a glimpse into the similarities between the Emperor's actions and religious storytelling, even during this still-secular period of the Imperium. There is an immensely powerful individual going across the universe, bringing order to every planet. As the Primarchs were genetically modified to be inferior only to the Emperor himself, they were always in positions of great power on their own planets. They were all either rulers, or leaders of some sort, usually beloved by their citizens. To that end, even these individuals were brought to compliance before the Emperor and his truth. These events are highly reminiscent of how religion spread throughout humanity, especially Christianity. Before the light of the truth that this being brings, men both mighty and feeble kneel and weep in joy. The aspects of the culture that are strictly opposed to the offered truth are removed, either through laws and edicts, or outright purgation, and those that are not directly opposed to it are modified and assimilated into the greater framework. The fact that the Imperium is technically still opposed to religion during this point serves to further foreshadow the future, or rather, the failure of the Imperial Truth.

2.4. The Concept of Utopia and Mythological Framework

The concept of utopia has existed in humanity for almost as long as humanity itself walked the Earth. Because the world is full of hardships and horrors, the human mind always seeks ways to make it more accommodating; however, this is not always possible and no matter how much people work, there will always be pain and hardships to overcome. Because of that, a hallmark of human imagination has always been the utopia.

The forms utopias can take varied wildly over the course of history, beginning with religiously justified systems that should be emulated in ancient times, to Montesquieu and Voltaire's constitutional ideas, where numerous checks and balances exist to maintain public order and prevent abuses, to Rousseau's concepts of smaller, more closed utopias centered on small communities and everything in between. All of these concepts are united by the human desire to have a world without the hardships they know, a world where they can move forwards, to a more comfortable and safe life: "The idea of gradual sociopolitical progress was alien to the orthodox Christian belief that emphasized original sin and the promise of redemption as revealed in the Bible. Sociopolitical progress is not a Judeo-Christian concept, but an invention of an at least partially secularized Enlightenment" (Fokkema 124).

The Emperor's very goal to create a utopia echoes all of the issues humanity has already raised with the concept today. "From its inception in Plato's *Republic* and revival in Thomas More's *Utopia*, the concept of a perfect . . . form of a republic has been dogged by the specters of hypocrisy, contradiction and authoritarianism. There is tyranny in the womb of every utopia" (Herman 165). This description fits the nascent Imperium perfectly as it was borne out of one man's unflinching ambition. The Emperor may have designed an ideal system intended to bring about the best situation for his people, but he did so without consideration of any other possibility. The goal that was mankind's salvation allowed no other person to lead the race. Even the notion that the upward mobility of the Enlightenment period came from these secularist roots echoes the principle of the Imperial Truth, that the universe can be understood and grasped with proper knowledge.

The construction of this utopian society in the light of secularism holds a very ironic twist. The entire conquest that the Emperor plans and carries out, together with the fact that he created genetically enhanced generals, known as his sons to Imperial subjects, functions greatly like a myth. Myths have "had a frankly aetiological function: that is, they were cited as explanations and precedents for otherwise puzzling phenomena, including ritual practices" (Doherty 194).

Namely, the Great Crusade was the mighty effort that created the Imperium, its story was the story of the god Emperor sailing the stars, reclaiming his sons from planets, and assimilating their cultures into the fold. That is why the Imperium is so vast and includes such diverse cultures under it. This god Emperor was betrayed by a favoured son, who led a rebellion that led to the deaths or losses of many of his brothers and the mortal wounding of the Emperor. That is why the Imperium struggles, the Emperor is entombed on the Golden Throne, his sons are no longer present in the universe, and why the threat of heresy is ever present, and demands utter eradication by any means necessary.

Through this, the *Warhammer 40,000* universe presents two diametrically opposed worldviews as being equally problematic. While the zealotry and hatred of religious intolerance have been hallmarks of human cruelty for a long time, they are not the sole source of these problems. Saying that humanity was led astray solely because of religion does not look at the entire history of pain done with no respect to any sort of deity. *Warhammer 40,000* presents the irony in a man seeking secularism and science by framing all of his efforts as an origin myth for a regime that would grow into the very antithesis of his endeavors.

As such, the franchise offers an important glimpse into totalitarian mindsets and framework by utilizing a popular entertainment medium, the game aspect of it might be the most important one, but it does not confine the options the world can explore. Because of these aspects it has flourished. Players all over the world have found out about this universe and engaged with it, the universe was slowly fleshed out and a web of conflicting ideas and functions was created to enrich the player's experience rather than to deceptively push a narrative. The *Warhammer 40,000* franchise wears its bleak nature on its sleeve, inviting the players to discover for themselves why there is no hope in the universe and what lies beneath the veneer of Imperial martyrdom. Such an approach opens the possibility of further research for all involved, spurred not by artificial need but genuine interest: "The method does not lead students first to study in a detached way how myth is received or reproduced through the ages, but to recognize that good stories have a profound effect on all cultures and that comparison of similar stories from different cultures can illuminate both sides in ways otherwise impossible". (Frauenfelder 210).

3. The Degradation and Downfall

3.1. The Grasp of Religion

The Emperor would locate and bring to his side all of the lost Primarchs and instruct them in the ways of the Imperium, the nature of the Imperial Truth, and their role in it. Each Primarch would take charge of a legion, each warrior in it carrying some characteristic of theirs, and strike out across the galaxy, brining planets into the fold, crushing resistance, and instating the rule of law. Every single Primarch accepted that duty and carried it out in his own way. Even though the Primarchs were genetically engineered by the Emperor, every single one was a unique individual with different temperament. This was mainly due to the fact they were raised on different planets with different cultures. Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves, grew up on an inhospitable ice-world, where cultures lived in clans reminiscent of Vikings; as such he was honest but constantly battle-ready. Unlike Russ, Roboute Guilliman, Primarch of the Ultramarines, grew up on a fairly civilized planet, which retained the rule of law despite the Long Night. Every single of these Primarchs, while clearly the sons of the Emperor in many ways as exhibiting some aspect of his character be it oratory skills, physical or psychic might, were not similar to him. They were much closer to a normal human when it came to their state of mind. Even though they were intelligent and mighty, all of them saw the Emperor as their father, and even if his arrival on their planets might have created some friction between them, they all looked to him as their father, which was in stark contrast to the Emperor's pragmatism.

Another Primarch was Lorgar Aurelian, who grew up on the desert world Colchis as the foster son of an influential priest. The priest was called Kor-Phaeron and belonged to the Covenant, a religious order of the planet that placed faith in glorious powers beyond the confines of reality, which paved the way for the existence life, the powers that were actually the gods of Chaos. Despite his station, Kor-Phaeron was in disagreement with the heads of the Covenant, claiming they should go out and share their truth with more people, his words fell on deaf ears, he struck out alone as he was cast out. He spent his days seeking tribes among the desert world, inducting them into the faith. In one of those tribes, he discovered Lorgar. Kor-Phaeron was an ambitious man, and he could immediately tell the child Lorgar was no ordinary human, and so he decided to use him to reach greater heights. He took Lorgar into his care and ordered the deaths of every tribe member in order to keep the boy's existence a secret from the Covenant.

Kor-Phaeron continued on his path, converting or punishing tribes as he found them. He took Lorgar as his apprentice; he was unflinching and cruel in his instructions, teaching Lorgar of the great powers, and how all of existence was the way it was because of their will. The strong were in power because the powers demanded it, the slaves were slaves for the same reason. As such all of them deserved what their lot in life was, which only would change if the gods willed it so. That callous cruelty permeated all his lessons. As Lorgar was unnaturally intelligent, his earnest questions and comments only served to prod at Kor-Phaeron's ego. Despite Kor-Phaeron's cruel nature, Lorgar took to the religion naturally, retaining his curiosity and wonder, despite his teacher's best efforts. Kor-Phaeron instilled great loyalty in Lorgar and passed his title, the Bearer of the Word, to him. As they were moving across the Planet, Lorgar began receiving visions of a man clad in armour. Kor-Phaeron grasped the opportunity and told him they were visions of his own destiny and bade him to lay low the Covenant. Lorgar himself surmised it was not him, but rather the one being they should truly venerate. This was in reality the Emperor, psychically reaching out to his progeny as he searched for them. Lorgar and his host made way across the desert dunes and gathered believers to their cause, but when they marched upon the capital of Vharadesh they were met with the corpses of the head priests and the city already embracing Lorgar, the Bearer of the Word, who spoke to them of the one being that would one day descend upon Colchis, a being who all of Colchis must accept. This turn of events displeased Kor-Phaeron, who saw Lorgar's claims as usurpation of his faith. He served the Great Four, not one being. Even among his own, Kor-Phaeron nurtured a cadre of conspirators, sharing his true religion, even as Lorgar was straying, ever vigilant to set him back on the path. For the time being, they went along with Lorgar's plans: "A simple choice that all must face. Submit to the Word of Lorgar, or be crushed beneath the Mace of Lorgar" (Thorpe, *Lorgar* 3:1:5).

In his absence during the campaign, Lorgar found that many bristled against the new faith he preached, and upon his return home he engineered a purge. Despite being among the main instigators for this deviancy, Kor-Phaeron concealed his actions and remained in Lorgar's good graces. When the Emperor arrived upon the surface of Colchis, he found the planet and his son already committed to the cause.

When presented with his own Legion, Lorgar spared no time in accepting them as his own, renaming them from the Imperial Heralds to the Word Bearers. His modified Colchisian religion was modified to fit with the Emperor's conquest. Every single world the Word Bearers reclaimed was brought into compliance with the Emperor's goals. Statues would be erected and the legion would stay behind to make sure the world was fully compliant and law fully established before

moving on. Lorgar spent his time nurturing his contemplative nature: reading, writing books, entering discussions with his confidantes as well as some of his Primarch brothers. Kor-Phaeron followed Lorgar into the Emperor's service, but his loyalty never once wavered from the faith he nurtured back on Colchis, together with Erebus, another man deeply loyal to the forces of Chaos, he indulged Lorgar in his service of the Emperor, waiting for an opportunity to push him back on the path of Chaos, back into the service of the four gods, which would present itself in the form of Monarchia.

One of the worlds brought to compliance by Lorgar's Word Bearers was Khur. It was decided that the legion would build the perfect city, Monarchia, on this planet. The endeavour was completely successful by Lorgar's standards. The people were happy and loyal to the Emperor, statues lined the streets, towers regaled the people with the stories of success that their patron legion achieved all across the stars in the name of the Emperor. Every single day people gave thanks to the Emperor and bowed their head in worship. This was truly the ideal city Lorgar could have hoped for, with no need of any of the cruel methods he used during his time conquering Colchis. Against all of Lorgar's ~~well~~ good intentions, Monarchia was not an Imperium-compliant world, far from it in fact. As was established, the Emperor sought to abolish any and all religion from the face of mankind, and Monarchia was a city deep in the clutches of it; it did not matter that the religion was dedicated to him. It is not known why the Emperor had not taken action sooner against Lorgar's practices, perhaps he thought Lorgar would grow out of his dependence on divine forces, or perhaps Lorgar's actions up till that point were not as egregious, however with Monarchia ~~that~~ all that changed. Such a city could not be tolerated, and a Primarch that perpetuated a religion was not acceptable, so the Emperor called upon another one of his legions, the Ultramarines, and their Primarch Roboute Guilliman, and ordered them to raze Monarchia to the ground. The Ultramarines did as they were commanded and they descended upon Monarchia. All of the citizens were forcefully evacuated, and the city was burned to the ground afterwards.

The Word Bearers received distress signals from the beleaguered world and hurried back, expecting to defend the city from a force of aliens or rebels, what they did not expect was to see the ships of their fellow Imperial legion in orbit. Deeply confused and worried about the implications of this, the Word Bearers descended to surface to help the populace and find what answers they could. Lorgar was the picture of rage when confronted with the truth of the matter. Awaiting him were his brother Guilliman and Malcador the Sigilite, the right hand of the Emperor, a human psyker who had been advising the Emperor since the Unification Wars.

Malcador attempted to reason with Lorgar, to tell him why the Emperor deigned his pursuits as dangerous, but Lorgar would have none of it, even striking the man. Understanding that he cannot reason with Lorgar, Malcador reached out to the Emperor, and the Emperor answered. Teleporting down onto the planet, the Emperor confronted the shocked Lorgar, flanked by his ever loyal custodians. His first word upon arriving to Khur was "kneel," and with that singular word, the entire legion of Word Bearers present at the scene knelt, compelled by the sheer psychic might of the Emperor. His second word was again kneel, this time directed at shocked Lorgar, who, like the rest of his legion, knelt immediately. Once the display of force was achieved, the Emperor spoke at length. He reprimanded Lorgar for acting like a priest instead of the general he was meant to be; emphasizing the danger of religion once more, the Emperor told Lorgar that such brazen worship was endangering the whole of the Imperium:

> "This is worship," the Emperor said. "This is a poison to truth. You speak of me as a god, and forge worlds that suffer under the one lie that has brought humanity to the edge of extinction time and time again." "The people are joyous-" "The people are deceived. The people will burn when their faith is proven false." "My worlds are loyal." Lorgar was no longer kneeling. He rose to his feet, his voice rising with him. "My legion shapes the most fiercely loyal worlds in your Imperium." +It is not my Imperium+[2] . . . +It is the Imperium of Man. The empire of humanity, enlightened and saved by the truth+" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 49)

Lorgar, however, was unfazed: "I will not be silenced because you do not like the melody of one single word. In your grip, a thousand worlds turn! By your will, a million vessels sail the void. You are immortal, undying, seeing all and knowing all that transpires across creation. Father, you are god in all but name. All that remains is to confess to it" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 49). Even when faced with the psychic might of the Emperor bearing down upon both him and his entire legion, Lorgar remained adamant in his beliefs. The Emperor just shook his head, beckoning Lorgar to learn from this event and to change his ways, then departed from the planet. Thus was the shaming of the Word Bearers legion and their Primarch complete, an event that would have dire implications for all humanity.

Lorgar's life is key to the analysis of the degradation of the Imperial Truth because it directly showcases both why it happened and the deeper mental processes behind it. Lorgar Aurelian grew up directly influenced by the powers of Chaos due to the effect Kor-Phaeron had on his

[2] The pluses describe words that were not simply spoken and heard, but that echoed as a psychic message for all those present.

life. This, however, was not just a simple event of an impressionable child being corrupted beyond any and all possibilities of redemption. Even though Lorgar accepted many things Kor-Phareron taught him, he never did it without a certain degree of inquisitive intent. From the first moment Kor-Phaeron found him, Lorgar already displayed an interest in forces beyond what he knew; moreover, Kor-Phaeron was not even aware of the child's existence as he was preaching to the wild tribes. Even after all the abuse Kor-Phaeron inflicted upon Lorgar in hopes of conditioning him to be malleable to his words, which was by all accounts successful, Lorgar still contested Kor-Phaeron's faith and modified it to worship the one being, the Emperor, instead of the gods of Chaos. For all intents and purposes, Lorgar abandoned the Chaos faith for veneration of the Emperor during his rule of Colchis and the initial centuries of the Great Crusade. The severity of Kor-Phaeron's influence is put into question by Kor-Phaeron himself at the end of *Lorgar: Bearer of the Word* when he mused why the child never used his many gifts to put an end to the abuse: "Why? Why had he put up with the humiliation, the physical pain, the disdain of his adoptive father? The surest disguise for his own ambition had been to hide it within the cloak of another" (Thorpe, *Lorgar: Bearer of the Word*). The shaming of the Word Bearers legion on Khur would thus be the decisive event pushing Lorgar back into the clutches of Chaos. Even if it is unknown just how far Lorgar had been influenced by Chaos, both during the initial Warp storm that separated the infant Primarchs as well as during the early years of his life, it is irrevocable that the burning of Monarchia was a key event that put Lorgar on the path to damnation.

3.2. The Seeds of Heresy

After the burning of Monarchia and the shaming of his legion, Lorgar isolated himself for months in contemplation. Unsure of what would come next, Lorgar, more than ever, needed guidance. It was at that moment that Kor-Phaeron decided to grasp the opportunity to push Lorgar back into the embrace of the Chaos gods. Together with Erebus, Kor-Phaeron joined Lorgar in his meditative seclusion, listening to his doubts, and slowly opening the possibility of returning to the old faith of Colchis. Together they weaved what they knew of the Emperor and the Primarchs into a description that would reassure Lorgar, make him more malleable. They pointed out to Gulliman having inherited his father's heart and soul, Horus Lupercal his pride and ambition, and Lorgar his hope for mankind. Lorgar, however, knew that they were trying to

influence him, but allowed them to continue regardless: "'You are both conspirators,' he laughed, the sound soft. 'Do not fear my wrath. I am enjoying this game. It is enlightening'" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 63). During those visits, the two agents of Chaos explained that even if the Emperor was not actually a god and forbade worship, a warlord who existed only to conquer worlds and snuff religion out, there was another faith, one that was true, one that Lorgar worked to destroy, one that could yet offer hope for him and his legion. Despite being appalled at the prospect of everything he worked towards after conquering Colchis being a lie, Lorgar agreed to Kor-Phaeron and Erebus' idea, and prepared to seek out the truths of the old faith.

It was with that resolution that the Word Bearers legion set out to correct their course. The Emperor bid them to abandon his worship, and so they did: "There were many who desired faith, needed it to sustain them in these troubling times. If faith in the Emperor was banned they would look elsewhere to fill the void, and it was then that Kor-Phaeron had their ear" (Thorpe, *Lorgar: Bearer of the Word*). The legion would carry out Lorgar's orders, and burn all scriptures and works venerating the Emperor. Kor-Phaeron looked at those acts, and laughed in mirth, knowing that these acts were heralding the advent of the Chaos gods. The Emperor wished them to abandon his veneration; they did so gladly. However, not every member of their legion had the same burning desire for a deity to venerate, even though the legions were effectively bred from their Primarch's genes, not all of them followed directly in his footsteps. Many looked to the Emperor's order as a chance to go back to their time as the Imperial Heralds, for not many of them took easily to Lorgar's changes to legion customs. These Astartes were systematically removed by Kor-Phaeron and his conspirators, most likely in accordance with Lorgar's wishes, who might have been more intellectually inclined than his brothers, but was above all a zealot. Once the legion had been unified, Lorgar made sure to hide these changes from the rest of the Empire and especially the contingent of Custodians the Emperor assigned to the legion after Monarchia to monitor them. After Monarchia, he led his legion into battle once more, to bring a world to compliance, and on that world he resolved to finally put all of his doubts to rest.

Lorgar left Kor-Phaeron in charge of the majority of legion forces to continue the Great Crusade as ordered while he took a single expeditionary force and undertook a pilgrimage, which was an important facet of the old Colchisian faith. A path to find the truth of the universe, a recurring theme in many religions, a journey to find the truth of the divine. During his conquests in the Emperor's name, Lorgar ordered the extermination of thousands of tribes in order to reach the secular compliance of the Imperial Truth. Unbeknownst to him, Kor-Phaeron spared some of

these tribes in order to preserve their rites. Having lost faith in the Emperor, and looking to rekindle his old faith, Lorgar needed someone to show him the way, and Kor-Phaeron pointed him towards one such world.

There is a place at the edge of the galaxy called the Eye of Terror. This churning void acts as a rip in the fabric of reality, a portal leading directly to the Warp. Planets in the vicinity of this rift feel the effects of the Warp to a much larger degree than the rest of the galaxy. Lorgar was pointed to one such world, Cadia, where he was told he would find guidance and answers. On that planet, Lorgar found a tribe of humans with a primitive culture and a religion similar to that of the old faith of Colchis. One of the Custodians advised against associating with the tribe, but Lorgar placated him, and they made landfall. The tribes appeared to have a language similar to Colchisian. Among them one woman stood out, called Lorgar by name, despite never having met him before, and explained that she would be his guide. She was called Ingethel, and said that she was chosen by the Powers, his true fathers, to guide him. Lorgar accepted her invitation, while maintaining a facade of acting as the Emperor's herald and followed them to a holy site. Ingethel explained that in order to show him the truth of the universe he desired, he would bear witness to a ritual of her ascension. Once more the Custodian objected but was overturned. Lorgar and his expeditionary force spent days collecting and archiving details of the Cadian religion, making note of the many similarities between it and the old faith. Clearly, the Powers the old Covenant of Colchis believed in had the same reverence here. It was with this reverence that the ritual of ascension was carried out.

This ritual was the turning point in Lorgar's quest for truth. Up till that point, he acted on faith alone, his transgressions against the Emperor only formal, his doubts still manifest, this event would change that. The ritual was carried out inside the central chamber of a network of caverns. Ingethel danced a tribal carnal dance in the middle while tribesmen drummed and sang. Human sacrifices were impaled on the edges of the chamber, nine in total. Lorgar watched on, captivated by her dance. His own legionaries seemed perturbed by the sight, but standing loyally regardless, eager to find the truth together with their Primarch. Ingethel paused in her dance and requested a tenth sacrifice, one that Lorgar had to provide as the seeker of truth. The Custodian that was assigned to observe proceedings could stand by no longer and levelled his spear towards Lorgar at that moment, calling for the Primarch's arrest. Despite the attempts by the company captain to defuse the situation, violence broke out in the cavern. The Custodian killed four out of the six Word Bearers present, failed to strike Lorgar, and was brought down, still barely alive. The treachery against the Emperor begun in earnest, though not all of them were ready to cope with

it. Despite all of the Word Bearers being religious and questioning many of the Imperium's practices, at this time only Kor-Phaeron, Erebus as well as the legion chaplains, trained by Erebus himself, were truly Chaos worshippers. Lorgar was looking for the signs to decide which side to choose, the signs he found in this moment. The rest of the legion was still very much part of the Imperium but questioning it, so this event was shocking to them; they chose defence of their Primarch over the Emperor's orders, and it was a turbulent notion: "We have just killed one of the Emperor's own guardians, and your eulogy in this moment is 'Nicely done, brother'? Are you insane? We stand upon the edge of heresy against the Imperium" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 213). Lorgar ordered the captain to put the Custodian, who was still barely clinging to life, out of his misery, when Ingethel screamed that he was ordained to be the last sacrifice. The captain tried to convince his Primarch to abandon this ritual, to leave and never return, but Lorgar was past doubts. At that moment in time, Lorgar started hearing voices, laughter, he looked upon Ingethel and gave the order to impale the Custodian upon the final vacant spike; when the Captain protested once more, the serene visage of Lorgar, son of the Emperor, cracked for the first time; as he viciously threatened the Captain's life, for a moment his visage foreshadowed his daemonic future. The final sacrifice was offered, and the ritual continued to its final part, Ingethel was anointed with the blood of the sacrificed, and stood in the centre of the chamber, arms spread wide. Suddenly she floated up in the air, and in seconds her body was violated, reduced to bits of gore by unseen forces, and from her remains rose a disgusting creature, towering and monstrous, a demon that called itself Ingethel the Ascended. When it approached the Word Bearers, it spoke how they were not the first Colchisians to find Cadia. Millennia ago, the prophets of Colchis found the planet as part of their own Pilgrimage in search of angels, angels that did not exist, but the gods did. Ingethel would show Lorgar the truth of these gods, but demanded the lives of the two Astartes left in the room, the company Captain and Chaplain, it would guide the warriors into the Eye of the Warp, where it would hurt them, but they would return with answers. Lorgar balked at the demands this creature made, claiming he would not sacrifice them for answers. The creature laughed saying: "*Do you believe that? Nothing matters more to you than the truth. The Powers know their son's heart. They know what you will do before it is done. If you desire enlightenment, you will take this first step*[3]" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 222)

[3] Much like with the Emperor's psychic command, the text in italics represents psychic communication; however, unlike the Emperor's psychic wave of force, which was a simple exercise of authority, this represents the crawling sensation as the daemon Ingethel's statements worm their way into the mind of those listening.

Just like Ingethel said, Lorgar agreed to the demands and a ship was outfitted to journey into the eye. Accommodations were made for the squad of Astartes that included the chosen, company Captain Argel Tal and company Chaplain Xaphen. They escorted Ingethel as well, their guide during this journey. The Captain informed all the crew not to look at the creature, not to listen to it or to remain in its vicinity. The fewer of the crew members were exposed to it the better. However, the combination of Ingethel on board as well as the proximity to the Eye took its toll in the form of mutinies on the lower decks, maddened crew members that had to be put down. On the bridge, men reported hearing voices, killing each other. The Astartes managed to enforce order but barely. Finally, the order was given to vacate the observation deck of the ship and to take Ingethel there. On this observation deck, Ingethel told them to look through the glass, and peer into the Warp storm outside. Argel Tal saw only the storm at first, then began to see the storm coalesce into fleeting shapes, then he saw shadows of faces, contorted in fear and suffering: "'This is hell. . . This is the underworld of human imagination.' *Do not be blinded by dogma. This is the Primordial Truth. Creation's shadow. The layer behind the stars*" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 236).

Ingethel then showed them one of the dead worlds in the Eye of Terror, beckoning a vision into their minds, a vision that seemed to feel suspiciously real. The vision was of the world's final moments, its alien race culled by a wave of daemons. This alien empire, through their actions, birthed a god of pleasure, their decadence was so massive that over millennia it materialized into a new Power in the Warp, giving birth to a Chaos god. Its birthing cries caused the tear in reality that is the Eye of Terror and consumed every single living being on every planet. Ingethel claimed that in the moment of triumph, the moment when the Primordial Truth was laid bare to this alien race, that race looked away in horror, and it was culled for that weakness, humanity could still be saved from that fate. The Astartes on the deck argued amongst themselves, most claiming that they could not return to the Imperium with this truth, that it would rip itself asunder in civil war. Xaphen, the chaplain, said it is their duty to bring truth to humanity, that this entire trip was for the sake of truth. Ingethel interrupted their quarrel with another vision, one that would quell any doubts.

They stood inside of a massive laboratory, technicians moving about, focused only on their data sheets, not paying attention to them. These were the Emperor's gene labs during the Unification war period. All around them was old technology – the precursor of their own augmentations. Most importantly, before them stood gestation pods containing children that were engineered to be perfect: this was the birthing place of the Primarchs. The Astartes marveled at the sight of

these superhuman leaders in their infant forms, their beloved father and lord, Lorgar among them, when Ingethel warned them not to make any sudden moves, and to remain calm, the inhabitants would ignore them as long as they did not bother them, and the Emperor would remain ignorant of their presence, as long as they kept their emotions in check. They continued exploring the laboratory when they noticed a device connected to the gestation pods that worked suspiciously similarly to the technology that keeps ships safe from Warp storms as they traverse the Immaterium, which meant that the infant Primarchs were being protected from Warp influence, which should not have been a factor during this period of mankind's history. These were the laboratories of the Lord of Mankind, not some techno-barbarian warlord he conquered, the Warp should never have had such an influence here to warrant such a massive Geller field[4] generator. Spurred on by these revelations brought by the daemon, the Astartes came to a realization: "The Emperor that denies all forms of divinity shaped his own sons with the blessings of forgotten gods. Prayers and sorcery are written upon their gestation pods. This is the most glorious madness" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 252). It was then that the warriors realized that these were not the mere visions of the past, through the unknowable reality bending forces of the Warp, but that they were guided here to make history happen. Argel Tal understood immediately, he unsheathed his swords, and looked towards his brothers: "I am weary of being lied to by the Emperor, brother. I am so tired of being ashamed, when what we believe is the truth" (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 253). Argel Tal swung the blades, and sabotaged the Geller Field generator, in essence causing the Warp storm that spirited the Primarchs away and set the stage for all of the events that would unfold. The moment he did so, Ingethel spirited him away in another vision, this time showing how all the pods landed on their respective planets. Upon witnessing Lorgar's pod crashing onto Colchis, Argel Tal saw misty tendrils crawled into the pod during its flight towards the planet, causing restlessness in the child's sleep, Lorgar had been chosen by the gods ever since to be their messenger.

At that point, one final step remained, and Ingethel described it as a leap of faith. The Astartes saw the Primordial Truth, they saw that the Emperor lied to them, and they saw the extinction that would follow if they were to reject it, so all that was left was to accept it; Ingethel told them to deactivate the Geller field, to allow the forces of the Warp onto the vessel. The Emperor and his ways were Anathema to humanity, there would be no victory against the gods, only servitude or death, the Emperor would lead the human race to extinction with his defiance. Argel Tal

[4] The Geller field generators are the technology that protect ships or other transports from daemonic incursion, by repelling psychic forces. These fields are all that protect ships during their traversals through the Warp, even a momentary flicker in their operation could lead to daemonic interference aboard the vessel.

shuddered at the prospect, but ordered his squad to destroy the Geller field generator on the ship; within ten seconds, the screams began. Ingethel attacked and killed all the Astartes present, the daemon infestation killing the rest. Then daemons possessed the Marine squad and brought them back to life, who then piloted the vessel, now devoid of all life save the squad of Astartes out of the Eye, and back to their Primarch with the answers he sought. Lorgar listened to Argel Tal recount the events, with constant interruptions by the daemon possessing him, and told him to hide his affliction until the time to act came. And so the chain of events that would be known as the Horus heresy began in earnest.

For decades, the Word Bearers continued the Great Crusade under the watchful eyes of the Custodians assigned by the Emperor, however now they were using Warp sorcery and foul sacrifice to falsify reports and block contact in order to keep their deception up. Despite the circumstances, Argel Tal grew close to the Custodians through training and battle; he might have been lost to Chaos, but he viewed it as a necessary sacrifice to save humanity, he had no hatred for the men who still believed in the Emperor's lies. It was not to last as the Custodians found out about the part of the ship where these foul sacrifices were carried out. They then fought their way through the ship and to a dropship, trying to escape and bring word to the Emperor of the growing cancer in the Imperium. Argel Tal and his squad, promoted to a place of honour after their trip through the Warp, chased them down, their daemonic possession fully manifest, transforming their flesh and merging it with their armoured suits. The Custodians stood valiantly, knowing there would be no escape but forever loyal to the Emperor and his plans for humanity. Their leader, Aquillon, regarded Argel Tal with cold mirth, accusing him of abandoning the Emperor's vision of perfection, of abandoning their humanity. Argel Tal responded with words that would foreshadow the depths of misery that would lead the rest of the traitor legions to abandon the Imperium:

> "*We were never human!*" Hissing spit sprayed from Argel Tal's jaws as he roared the words. "*We. Were. Never. Human.* We were taken from our families to fight the Forever War in the name of a thousand lies. Do you believe this truth is easy to bear? Look at us. *Look at us.* We have seen the Imperium burn. We have seen the species brought to extinction. We have seen it happen, as it happened before. The cycle of life in a galaxy owned by laughing, thirsting gods." (Dembski-Bowden, *The First Heretic* 414-15)

The Custodians were slain, the secret of Lorgar's treachery saved, and he drew plans to plunge the galaxy into the waiting grip of the Chaos gods.

3.3. The Need for Brotherhood

The pained cry of Argel Tal signified the costs of the Imperial Truth on the Imperium's citizens and soldiers. The Emperor's vision was for humanity as a whole, not the humans themselves. He never truly looked upon the Primarchs as his sons, because he could never show such deference to anyone. He lived and worked for the benefit of humanity as a whole. Every interaction he had was only ever for the benefit of mankind. Because of that, everyone who ever spoke to the Emperor saw a slightly different man, a scholar would see a fellow researcher, a soldier would see a warrior without peer, a public official would see the finest orator ever to live, all this would be both true and coloured by the subject's perception at the same time. Despite all this, the Emperor was cold and calculating above all, ready to sacrifice his original legions, the Thunder Warriors, to further his plans, and showing no more warmth to his sons. This is best seen in the scene when the Emperor speaks of one of the Primarchs who forcibly underwent a cybernetic modification during the early years of his life when a device replaced entire parts of his brain and artificially stoked his rage with every act and every emotion. The Emperor considered removing it and gave up on the notion when he realized it would kill him. Without emotion, without pain, simply as a matter of fact: "A compromised primarch is still a primarch. . . It is not my son Arkhan. None of them are. They are warlords, generals, tools bred to serve a purpose. Just as the Legions were bred to serve a purpose" (Dembski-Bowden, *The Master of Mankind* ch.7). Even the very bonds of brotherhood the legions had, the affection for their Primarchs, had been bred into them by the Emperor through the modifications they received to ensure the finest fighting force he could muster, to produce more obedient forces that were more motivated to fight his wars. However, even if those bonds had been engineered, they were no less important to the Adeptus Astartes, and even if the familial bonds the Primarchs felt towards the Emperor were one-sided, they were still a large driving force for many of them, none more so than Horus Lupercal, the first Primarch reclaimed by the Emperor as well as his greatest general. The Emperor was not callously cruel, even if he saw the Primarchs as nothing but his generals, he still offered them the choice to lead their legions as they saw fit, to understand that they were to to unite humanity, to see their destiny in the stars: "The first thing my father gave me was an astrological text. It was a simple thing, a child's primer. I have it here somewhere. He noted my wonder in the stars, and wished me to learn and understand" (Abnett 3:1). Like all the other Primarchs, Horus might have been just a general, but he was still the chosen general by the Emperor, and the Emperor had great expectations of all of them, but especially Horus. Upon the

conclusion of the Ullanor campaign[5], the Emperor decided it was time to retreat from the front lines and return to Terra in order to enact his final project to separate humanity from the Warp, in his stead he appointed Horus as Warmaster and left him in charge. However, none of the Primarchs present knew why exactly the Emperor retreated to the throne world, only that his great project was the key for humanity's survival, for none but the closest advisors of the Emperor were aware of it, not even the Primarchs. This unexplained withdrawal from the campaign would create lasting cracks in the morale of many Imperial forces, who felt as if they were abandoned with no reason given: "No one had questioned the choice of First Primarch Horus as Warmaster to act in his stead. They simply questioned the need for a proxy at all" (Abnett 1:3). None would feel these effects more than Horus, who was not only separated from his father, but left with a massive responsibility in his stead:

> "After Ullanor, he believed the time had come when he could leave the crusading work in the hands of the primarchs so that he might be freed to undertake a still higher calling." "Which is?" Loken waited for an answer, expecting some transcendent truth. What the Warmaster said was, "I don't know. He didn't tell me. He hasn't told anyone." Horus paused. For what seemed like an age, the wind banged against the longhouse shutters. "Not even me," Horus whispered. Loken sensed a terrible hurt in his commander, a wounded pride that he, even he, had not been worthy enough to know his secret. (Abnett 1:10)

This disconnect between the Emperor and his Primarchs affected other legions rather than just Lorgar's or Horus'. Astartes would feel disconnected from their goals in the Great Crusade. For the Great Crusade was the march of humanity across the galaxy, spreading the Imperial Truth in order to reclaim the stars, the Imperial Truth was inexorably tied to the Emperor, who had wrought the entire Imperium to serve his will, the Emperor was the Imperium, without him at the front, the legions felt lost. It was due to this feeling that the Warrior lodges formed among many of the legions. These lodges were the clandestine gatherings of Astartes, where they could speak to each other freely, unfettered by the formality of rank, so they can exchange stories, tactics and engage in all the camaraderie a brotherhood entailed, something they could call upon to keep their morale high:

> The Emperor isn't a god, but he might as well be. He's so far removed from the rest of mankind. Unique. Singular. Who does he call brother? No one! Even the blessed

[5] The final campaign against an alien horde, the battle was massive and upon its conclusion the Emperor ordered the transformation of the entire planet to hold a celebration where he would announce his return to Terra.

> primarchs are only sons to him. The Emperor is wise beyond all measure, and we love him and would follow him until the crack of doom, but he doesn't understand brotherhood, and that's all we meet for! (Abnett 2:5)

This would stand in stark opposition to Imperial policy where clandestine gatherings were looked upon poorly, all who were in the Emperor's service should do so in the open, not in shadowed halls. However, the Emperor's departure, almost symbolically, represented the withdrawal of light to make room for shadows. Horus understood this, and allowed the lodges in his legion to operate, as long as they kept out of the public eye, for he understood their pain. Astartes questioned their place in the Imperium, and many bristled at the prospect of being nothing more than the implements of the Emperor's will.

These lodges, however, were instigated by the Word Bearers legion; sensing the growing anxiety in the Astartes legions, they sent chaplains out among them, looking for the ones most in need of guidance, and sowed the seeds of dissent, beginning in the basic needs like camaraderie. While innocent and loyal at first, these lodges would become conspirator dens as the first traitor legion inducted more and more brethren.

The Astartes were not the only ones in need of guidance, the human crew and soldiers felt equally ill at ease with the never ending conquests, without the Emperor at their head, urging them onwards and keeping them focused. Despite the efforts of iterators, those appointed by the Emperor to serve as public speakers and educate people in the Imperial Truth, many began questioning their actions, unsure of the many atrocities the Imperium committed in the name of this secular future:

> God, in every incarnation and pantheon, was long perished, but still men hankered after the ineffable. Despite prosecution, new credos and budding religions were sprouting up amongst the cultures of Unified Man. Most vigorous of all was the Imperial Creed that insisted humanity adopted the Emperor as a divine being. A God-Emperor of Mankind. (Abnett 1:5)

Religions such as these were inspired by Lorgar's texts venerating the Emperor from the time before he and his legion fell to Chaos. Even though the Emperor shamed Lorgar and his legion for this behaviour, this changed little for many in the Imperium who needed something to believe in. Over the course of the Crusade, the Imperium had encountered Warp-created dangers many times. Every single one had been explained away as normal phenomena, no human member of the Crusade had been informed about the unnatural manifestations the Warp can cause. This was

precisely planned by the Emperor to curb any religious notions formed around the Warp, mostly because nobody truly understood it, as such complete explanations could not be given, and the holes in knowledge are ever the cause for blind faith: “There are insane dangers in the cosmos, dangers that mankind is fundamentally unable to comprehend, let alone survive. So he protects us. There are truths out there that would drive us mad by one fleeting glimpse of them. So he chooses not to share them with us” (Abnett 2:6). As logical as this plan might have been, it led to people just putting more and more faith in the Emperor to keep them safe. That faith might have begun as the secular kind, but it inevitably morphed into religious belief, the men and women who served the Emperor needed a light in the endless expanse of the universe, and they saw it in him, paving the way for what would eventually become the Imperial Cult.

Some even questioned the feasibility of the Imperium, asserting that many human cultures they forced into compliance were equally sure that their empires would last, such notions were fiercely quashed, not by any official Imperial force, but by mere troops, zealously loyal to the Emperor and his vision.

This state of affairs would not last, for the Horus Heresy was almost at hand, and Lorgar sent out his First Chaplain Erebus to influence Horus’ legion, the Luna Wolves, and the Warmaster himself. After a quelling rebellion engineered by the Word Bearers’ Chaplain, Horus was gravely injured, and Erebus took advantage of his state to take him to a lodge under pretenses of healing, when in reality he used sorcery to enter Horus’s dreams and sway him to the traitor cause, telling him of the Warp powers used by the Emperor, and how he kept it from him. In that way, he gave the upcoming rebellion its leader, and namesake.

3.4. The Final Project

The Horus Heresy ravaged the empire, approximately half of all its fighting forces defected to the Warmaster’s rebellion, and multiple loyal Primarchs were injured or lost in the resulting years, and Horus made his way towards Terra to have his vengeance on the Emperor who seemingly lied to and abandoned him.

The reason the Emperor had to leave his post as the master of the Crusade was because he was the only being strong enough to psychically maintain the Golden Throne, a device on Terra that projected a signal that psykers used to navigate ships through the Warp. However, his final

project would change that, it would be used to project the Emperor's psychic force into the Warp, creating a stable pocket that would allow humanity to evolve as a psychic race unimpeded by the danger of daemonic possession: "If we cannot stifle the gods' power in the Warp, then what better means to defeat them than to channel it away? . . . Rather than light the Warp, could He purge it?" (Thorpe, *The First Wall* 397). In addition, the Emperor worked to claim the Webway, a complex of dimensional hallways used by the alien empire that was consumed by the birth of one of the Chaos powers, the very event Ingethel used to sway the Word Bearers to Chaos. These hallways allowed the alien race to traverse space without breaching the Warp, but in their pride they never learned how to cut themselves off from the influence of the Warp, which caused their damnation. This was the reality of the Emperor's vision, unlike the alien race that was decadent and mired in its ways, he would unite all of humanity to safeguard it, eliminate religion and other superstitious belief to deny the Chaos powers their grip on humanity, and use the Webway and the Golden Throne to create a safe pocket in the Warp, through his own psychic might, that would let humanity flourish.

With the growing pressure from the traitor forces, as well as complications brought about by the conflict, the project was failing, the Emperor had to abandon the Golden Throne to safeguard his forces in the Webway, which was breached by enemy forces. Without his psychic might, however, the throne would not be functional, psychic power had to be supplied to it, or the entire project would fail. As no living being could match the Emperor's psychic might, the Emperor invoked the Unspoken Sanction. It was another terrible sacrifice the Emperor would make for the human race: an order through which one thousand psykers were abducted and sacrificed to maintain the throne's functionality during the time the Emperor would be away. Yet, what was supposed to be a one-time sacrifice to ensure the survival of the species, would become a common occurrence with the climax of the Heresy. Horus advanced on Terra, and the Emperor had to meet him in battle, he teleported onto Horus' ship and fought him in single combat, killing him, but suffering a mortal wound. While the Emperor was away, another thousand psykers could not be found, so his right hand, Malcador, took his place on the throne, maintaining it. By the time the mortally wounded Emperor returned to the throne room, Malcador perished from the strain, and the Emperor was interred on the throne, which would act as his life-support forevermore. Because of his mortal wounds, the Emperor could not maintain the throne properly, and the sacrifice of psykers would become a daily occurrence, just to keep it functioning, for if it failed, the Emperor would die, and humanity would lose the ability to traverse the Warp, which was now the only option available to it.

3.5. The Absence of Key Needs

In his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" (370-96), Abraham Maslow presents multiple basic needs that are important for a human being, starting from the very basic biological needs and moving up to more abstract concepts that are unique to humans because of our ability to form higher thought processes. These needs and their implications serve as an excellent guide for the analysis of the Emperor's vision and its problems.

The first of these he calls the physiological needs, pointing out the homeostasis, the self-regulating mechanism of the body, and appetite, the indicative process through which the body signals its needs, as its main factors. In the event of these needs not being met, they will take priority over others in any normal human being. These needs the Emperor recognized and understood intimately. His superhuman intellect let him recognize and understand the intricacies of the human anatomy at a glance, which in turn allowed him to wager that knowledge for various cures or treatments.

The second set of these needs Maslow dubs the safety needs. These needs do not just affect avoidance of outwardly threatening situations, but also the preference to stick to familiar things. These needs are more pronounced with children than adults, due to the expectation that adults should be able to maintain levelheadedness in dangerous or unfamiliar situations over immediately seeking to satisfy their base need for safety without further consideration. With this second set of needs, the first shortcoming of the Emperor's visions can be seen. While the Emperor did work towards making the galaxy a safer place for humanity, he did so in a shepherding way. He set out a plan that only allowed his own vision, the expectation that adults can be trusted with maintaining a level head is completely absent, since the Emperor kept many of this intentions secret, many of which did not have the best intentions of humans in mind, only the intentions of humanity as a whole. To a degree, the Emperor treated all of humanity as a child, safeguarding it until his plans came to fruition, where he would see humanities potential realized.

The love needs are the next in Maslow's hierarchy, which should need no great explanation. These needs dictate man's desire for friendship, love and intimacy, and these are the needs that display the flaws of the Emperor's vision most clearly. While the Emperor could theoretically understand that such a need exists, to him it was no more than a physiological need, one borne from the hormonal activities of the human brain, unknown to most of the subjects beneath him. To that end the Emperor modified the Space Marines, attempting to influence them in such a

way as to use those needs to his benefit, to instill loyalty or coordination between them. Yet, over time, the Astartes noticed that the teamwork in battle rang hollow the moment the Emperor abandoned the Crusade, they craved the camaraderie of brotherhood, the comfort of trust, the ways to fill the gap left behind.

The following set of needs – the esteem needs – ties in closely to the previous. Namely, the human need for a stable, positive evaluation of themselves, the respect and admiration of their peers. These needs were exemplified most prominently with the two Primarchs Lorgar and Horus. Even with the influence of Chaos upon him, Lorgar never gave himself over to it, feeling the Emperor's psychic call for most of his time on Colchis. Upon being inducted to the Imperium and its Crusade, Lorgar labored ceaselessly to earn his father's praise. The fact he deified the Emperor only made the following shaming more severe for Lorgar. For Horus, however, this issue defined the core of his character. Horus was the very first Primarch recovered by the Emperor, as such he was closest to him. For his entire time knowing the Emperor, Horus was told that the entire galaxy was his for the taking, if he followed the Emperor's vision. Horus did not deify the Emperor, he understood and agreed with his vision, he was considered the Emperor's favorite by all. Even to the Emperor's cold and calculating mind, Horus was an immensely capable and intelligent general, one worth relying on in greater capacity than the rest. These accolades might have been great, but they weighed on Horus greatly, who, like the rest of the Primarchs, was much more human that the Emperor ever was. He only ever sought his approval, not out of pride or fear, but genuine need that was familial in nature. When the Emperor left him alone in charge of the Crusade, Horus took to the task admirably, but the secrecy with which the Emperor left ate away at him, forming the cracks that would allow Lorgar's machinations to influence him.

The final of Maslow's needs is the one for self-actualization, the need to further one's potential: "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be" (Maslow 382). The Emperor both succeeded and failed to meet this need. On the one hand, the Emperor recognized the values of art and music, encouraging education in all matters, supporting the Remembermancers and distributing iterators among the planets of his Imperium who educated both his armies and his subjects. On the other, he completely eradicated any and all knowledge pertaining to religion, and heavily policed knowledge of the Warp. He encouraged the self-actualization of some, but hindered that of others.

4. An Empire Perverted

4.1. The Imperium of Zealotry

In the years following the end of the Heresy, a new force would rise in the Imperium. In the now constantly threatened Imperium, more and more people sought the comfort of faith, and the once clandestine cults venerating the Emperor came to be the majority of the Imperial population. Because of that, the Imperial Cult was fully established, with the Ecclesiarchy at its head. With a large part of the Emperor's advisors gone, order would have been impossible to establish in the Imperium without this cult, which maintained order through faith in the Emperor. The Ecclesiarchy grew in power, and often clashed with the administrative forces of the Imperium, however all of them considered the Ecclesiarchy to be the voice of the Emperor. After the rebellion of a crazed Ecclesiarch, an agreement was reached. The Ecclesiarchy was still to be considered the voice of the Emperor, but they were not allowed to field any men under arms. The Imperial Cult was a mix of the original vision the Emperor set forth, being that humanity must be united, free from the mutant and alien, but also included Lorgar's previous tenet that the Emperor was a god safeguarding humanity, even echoing the chain of authority the covenant of Colchis used. Lorgar's own fall to Chaos was unknown to most, for many died during the heresy, and many more never even came into contact with any of the Space Marine legions, often generations passed after their worlds were brought into the fold. For as large as the legions were, the Imperium spanned untold billions of humans across thousands of planets. The Emperor became a mythic figure, his Astartes the Angels of Death that only few lived to see, the figures of legend that none really knew anything about. With the original nature of these scripts unknown, the Imperial Cult established an unforgiving regime where all deviancy would be punished. "At the very top of the conical construct, loud hailers broadcast stern hymns and blunt sermons on the nature of crime. Everything about the building was a threat to those who would entertain thoughts of malfeasance" (Swallow ch.3).

The Space Marine legions were broken into chapters to make sure nobody ever held the full might of a legion again, to stop another heresy from occurring. Many of these legions maintained elements of the Imperial Truth, but many more followed the Imperial Cult. The only true remnants of the secular truth were the Custodians who survived the Heresy.

The Imperial Cult and the Ecclesiarchy did maintain one fighting force, the Sisters of Battle, established directly because of the crazed Ecclesiarch, Goge Vandire. The Heresy left the Empire

in shambles, many worlds were abandoned by the Imperium as order was being reinstated. On one of those worlds, the faith in the Emperor grew as the only bulwark against the tumult that broke out. In this world existed an all-female cult venerating the Emperor. Goge Vandire visited this planet, and inducted the women into his service as the Adepta Sororitas, who served him loyally, seeing him as the voice of the Emperor. As his madness took its toll on the Imperium, the Custodians of Terra approached the leader of the female cult and brought her before the Emperor. The events of that day were sworn to secrecy, but upon her return the woman executed Vandire and re-pledged the order to the Imperium, allowing the now reformed Ecclesiarchy to retain a fighting force, for it contained no *men* at arms.

The Adepta Sororitas are a deeply religious force, every single one of them a zealot in service to the Emperor. They wear power armour much like the brothers of the Adeptus Astartes, but they bear no cybernetic augmentations. This does not mean that they cannot match the Astartes, for in the Adepta Sororitas a most ironic twist of the Emperor's intentions was manifested, one that truly signified the fall of the Imperial Truth. While the Emperor once wanted to foster humanity's psychic growth through his psychic might by shielding them from the Warp and making sure they do not attract the Chaos gods with superstitious notions, the Adepta Sororitas possess such a religious zeal that it in itself is strong enough to maintain a footprint in the Warp and manifest as psychic potential. This psychic potential gives the Sororitas a much higher ability to combat daemonic forces, one that even the Custodians cannot match, due to their belief in the secular Imperial Truth and the lack of zeal. Unfortunately, even though the zeal of the Sororitas can harm daemonic forces, it is still rooted in hatred of the inhuman, and absolute veneration of the Emperor, and as such feeds into the Warp. The Custodians are aware of this, but they also realise that for the Imperium to survive, this faith is necessary, and even as most of them balk at this perversion of the Truth, they must maintain it, for otherwise the Imperium would fall apart:

> All this, the saints, the visions, the tarot, they are tools – they are a means by which we may exert control. They are useful. We have shown any who might waver in their loyalty that the Emperor's forces are abroad. They now know that His servants will smite those who run from Terra, and His servants will be saved. Achallor's interment here is a symbol of that. Let them venerate him as a saint for a while. They would anyway. Best we make use of it. (Clark ch.38)

In the wake of the heresy, multiple other institutions were created, one of them being the Imperial Inquisition, established at the end of the Heresy and built for the purpose of seeking out any danger to the Imperium that military might alone could not handle. It had three major orders: the Ordo Malleus, which dealt with daemonic forces threatening the Imperium, the Ordo Xenos, which dealt with alien forces, and the Ordo Hereticus, which sought out and destroyed any heretics, mutants or deviant psykers. Its forces, the Inquisitors, stood outside of the chain of authority the Imperium had, answering only to the Emperor, who was mostly silent upon the throne, wasting away but never truly dying. They held considerable power and could even invoke the Exterminatus order, the purgation of an entire world, if they deemed it lost to heresy or aliens. None who spoke out against the Imperial Cult would escape their notice: "tears slide free of his eyes and paint their way down his face. 'Good,' I say. 'Now, I will ask you once more Master Thul. Show me the eagle ablaze, or I will burn you and your Reverie to the ground'" (Harrison).

The Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus found much of their work among the regiments of human soldiers once part of the Imperial Army. Much like the Space Marine legions, the Imperial army was broken into smaller parts, the Imperial Guard and the Imperial Navy, the Astra Militarum and the Navis Imperialis respectively. While the duty of these men was never easy or kind under the secular Imperial Truth, under the Imperial Cult it was monstrous. Entire planets handed over their men and women to serve in the Guard, who were taught from childhood how to wage war. Their faith in the Emperor would have to be absolute, their courage against the enemy unfailing. However, the universe was now much more treacherous, the Imperial forces strained and stretched thin, alien hordes or daemonic monstrosities, once matched by the superhuman Astartes, were now met in battle by mere men, with a cry on their lips, and Commisars at their backs, ready to execute any for cowardice in battle. These men were facing horrors beyond their ability, their only option to die in battle, and wear them down through sheer attrition. Even the men who lived to see multiple campaigns and higher ranks were equally expected to do two things, serve without question, and sire children so that they too may serve the Emperor. Yet, such a cruel life weighed heavily on many. Their only solace was the very faith that conscripted them into service, the faith in the Emperor, who would protect their souls as long as they served loyally:

> why would I bring a child into this universe? Why would I want a child so they too could grow in the dark, then join a regiment to go off and die on some faraway world? There is only pain in life, and service that leads to death, he wanted to say. He served gladly, but

> to force that on someone else... He could not doom another to this fate. He could not doom one who did not ask for it. Though he knew it must be done, he knew also what awaited him in the stars. Glory was a poor reward for horror. (Clark ch.15)

This was the Imperium left in the wake of Horus Heresy, the repressive and zealous regime that seems to be such a far cry from the original secular ways the Emperor advocated, the only remnants of them remaining in the few who fought alongside him, who understood that it could no longer exist. This turn of events was tragic, one that the Emperor in his inhuman wisdom could not foresee.

4.2. Repressive Regimes and Religion

The existence of totalitarian regimes has long been yet another of the hallmarks of the human capacity for cruelty. Human ambition has no limits outside of common sense and good will for the people around, the qualities that have always been in short supply. Sometimes these regimes are created from sinister schemes aiming to take hold of powerful positions, and sometimes they are created from good intentions that inadvertently lead to decisions meant for the good of the many over the few. Whatever their origin, regimes usually focus on centralizing power to only one faction or even one figure, creating a situation where competition or criticism is heavily punished. These regimes often justify this by using progress and betterment of the quality of life to pave the way for a complete takeover. When people are dissatisfied, it is much easier to take hold of hearts and minds by fanning the flames of concern and pain. “However, in circumstances of economic decline, stagnation or recession, autocrats have to replace carrots with sticks and rely upon the weapons of large-scale propaganda (lies) alongside those of selective repression (fear)” (Ledeneva 421).

The state of the post-Heresy Imperium clearly displays these aspects. Faced with a crumbling Imperium, the Emperor incapacitated and an Imperial Cult on the rise, the remnants of the Emperor’s closest circles realized they would have to leverage these aspects to keep the Imperium running. They knew that the Imperial Cult began from the writings of Lorgar, and even though its existence was anathema to the Emperor’s original intentions, it still acted like a stabilizing force and a way to enforce loyalty to the Imperium. Needs outweighed the principle and the Imperial Cult, or rather the Ecclesiarchy, ended up as one of the de-facto ruling bodies of the Imperium. This religion, together with the administrative forces of the Imperium, now had

the loyalty of the Imperial citizens; to maintain it, they constantly preached that humanity must continue the Emperor's vision, that waging war against the mutant, heretic and alien was just, and that abandonment of this purpose was tantamount to betraying the Emperor himself. Even though the Imperium of Man stopped expanding, it never stopped waging war, for war was the only purpose it has ever known.

The state of the Imperium echoes most of the fourteen features at the core of every fascist movement outlined by Umberto Eco in his *Ur-Fascism* (5-8):

1. The cult of tradition is heavily present, seeing as how the worship of the Emperor started happening even during the Crusade. "As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth has been already spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message" (Eco 6). In the Imperium, not only is the truth obscure, it is almost lost, the only "truth" remaining is that of the Cult, which retained only part of it: the duty to conquer and rule the stars. This is the glue that holds all of the culturally differing worlds together in the Imperial fold, while the secular Imperial Truth is lost to all but a scant few.

2. The rejection of modernism is ever present in the fact that the Imperium will never actually change, it subsists on principles of hatred and fear, any change could dangerously destabilize, or even destroy it.

3. Action for action's sake is echoed in every war cry of every soldier, to wage war is natural, to fight and die is an honour, there is no question about it for death in the Emperor's service is a glorious thing.

4. Criticism is met with death.

5. Fear of difference is a defining characteristic of the Imperium.

6. The Imperium is rife with poverty and sickness, the people are kept in line by stoking the flames of their faith.

7. The loyal subjects of the Imperium are told it is their duty as humans to take to the stars and fight for control, it is their birthright as dictated by the Emperor.

8. The enemies of the Imperium are simultaneously traitors and aliens too *weak* to face the Imperium without foul sorceries as well as *mighty goliaths* who can and must be conquered by the Imperial human.

9. There can be no peace in the stars, to live in the Imperium means to fight for it.

10. The very origins of the Imperium began with the Emperor deeming humanity unfit to govern itself; however, while he had the best intentions of humanity in mind, the current aristocracy of the modern Imperium is fraught with self-serving nobles and money-grubbers.

11. Martyrdom is the greatest honor one can achieve in the Imperium. While there are no true heroes, to be heroic in the Imperium means to serve, even outside of the universe; this concept is promoted by the image of a Space Marine valiantly fighting against a daemon with righteous fury on the myriad of artwork used for the franchise, to further emphasize this point, the Astra Militarum is beloved by fans precisely because it consists of regular man and women endlessly facing monsters far beyond themselves.

12. The sexually discriminatory aspect of this point does not apply to the Imperium. The Imperium is not intolerant of women, in fact women serve as men do, the only real case of strict differentiation being that only men can be Space Marines and Custodians, while only women are Sisters of Battle, along with some other niche forces. It must be said, however, that all of these forces are the very elite, and account for a fraction of the Imperium. However, the aspect of it focusing on weapon maintenance can be applied with an adjustment. The Imperium forces do have a great focus on maintaining weapons, but instead of the phallic exercises described by Eco, weapon maintenance reaffirms loyalty through religious reverence of the weapon instead. The extent to which this religious maintenance is carried out varies between forces, the elites like the Space Marines or Sisters of Battle commonly practice the full rites, while the Astra Militarum commonly does so in a reduced fashion, much closer to simple maintenance. Even though this is not a phallic or sexual exercise, more of a ritual sanctification, it still serves the purpose of reaffirming loyalty, together with the more pragmatic maintenance.

13. The value of Imperial subjects only exists in their monolithic number, as the resources to be measured and applied to the myriad needs the Imperium has, the Imperial subjects all live to serve.

The final and fourteenth point is the only one that cannot be applied to the Imperium. That is because Newspeak exists to obfuscate and hide the state of affairs, a notion the Imperium does not bother with. The Imperium functions with two primary languages, High and Low Gothic. High Gothic is the language of the high clergy and the Inquisition. Low Gothic is the bastardized version that the common men and women use, containing dialects based on the planet of origin for each culture. While Low Gothic is a form of somewhat reduced language, it cannot be readily compared to Newspeak.

The fact that a religious body is in charge of a totalitarian state, however, goes against the usual modus operandi of modern totalitarian states because religion implies that there is a force higher than the ruling party. The Imperium naturally circumvents this simply because the ruling party is a religion that venerates the founder, but this is not the only way in which the Imperium circumvents the criticisms of religion.

Much like the Emperor acting as a perversion of sorts for Nietzsche's notion of a superhuman, the post-Heresy Imperium can be seen as a perversion of his criticisms of Christianity. In his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche criticizes the ideas of good and bad, as presented by both Christianity and psychologists. In his analysis, Nietzsche connects the emergence of the word good with older words for warrior, contending that good was originally used by those who had the strength to conquer and establish themselves. The notions like good and pure did not have symbolical merit until the clergy intervened and used symbolic stories as simple solutions to compel people to obey rules that are good for them, but which they could not understand. Sexual abstinence, instead of being connected to the need to prevent the transmission of diseases, was turned into a holy act, just like many other religious prohibitions. These acts then wormed their way into the psyche of man, the faith and religion overtook the pragmatic value of the acts. In this way, the weak priestly mindset stifled the proper and strong acts of the warriors.

> The chivalric-aristocratic value judgments are based on a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health that includes the things needed to maintain it war, adventure, hunting, dancing, jousting and everything else that contains strong, free, happy action. The priestly-aristocratic method of valuation – as we have seen – has different criteria: woe betide it when it comes to war! As we know, priests make the most evil enemies – but why? Because they are the most powerless. Out of this powerlessness, their hate swells into something huge and uncanny to a most intellectual and poisonous level. (Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morality* 17)

Even though Nietzsche recognizes that clergy did play a useful role in providing a different point of view for people, he adamantly maintains that the toxic weakness of the priests is something that should exist only as a containing force for the feeble-minded and weak, that all other strong and fully functioning members of society should be removed from it.

This state of affairs is further confirmed by Nietzsche in his work *The Antichrist*, where he considers Christianity as a feeble offshoot of a healthier, more human Jewish religion, one that elevates weakness and despises strength. "Christianity is called the religion of pity. Pity is the

opposite of the tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings: pity has a depressive effect. You lose strength when you pity" (Nietzsche *The Antichrist* 6).

The post-Heresy Imperium echoes Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity in a similar way the Emperor echoes the apex human. If Christianity is the religion of weakness and pity, the Imperial Cult headed by the Ecclesiarchy is anything but this. Even though each man is comparatively powerless against all the foes the Imperium faces in the vast reaches of the galaxy, they are all trained from birth, then called to serve and to die against these foes. Pity for the weaker man cannot be found in the Imperium, those who are not of aristocratic birth either grow strong from poverty to serve, or are prepared from birth to train and enlist. The aristocrats have no pity for anyone, only avoiding these grueling tasks out of cowardice or benefit. Life in the military is similarly cruel, the soldiers will either charge into battle in droves, most of them dying in the process, or be summarily executed for cowardice and disobedience by the Commisars. The god Emperor expects humanity to fight for their place in the stars, death in his service, which is killing the alien, the mutant, and the heretic is highly praised and wanted. The desire for a life without war and battle means to abandon this duty and is essentially heretical. Thus, much as the Emperor is a perversion of the notion of the apex human, the Imperial Cult stands as a near comical "solution" to Nietzsche's misgivings about Christianity.

5. The Last Church on Terra

During the final years of the Unification wars, the Emperor razed the final church, but this event would herald the grim future of the Imperium through the words of one man. The church was kept by an old man named Uriah Olathaire, a humble priest of the Church of the Lightning Stone. As he lamented the fact nobody seemed to join his midnight services any more, a traveler entered the church, the Emperor in disguise. Identifying himself as Revelation, the traveler then engaged in a lively discussion with the priest, discussing the merits and vices of religion. The first topic was divine inspiration and Uriah pointed out a fresco of the church, lauded for its beauty, as a clear and present proof that there was a touch of divinity in the world. Revelation responded that inspiration was a powerful force, but not divine, and that great works had been achieved without such notions, mere foils for jealousy, claiming the artist would achieve equal mastery with non-religious material. Revelation continued to question Uriah why he persisted in his faith even if he knew religion was being systematically stamped out across Terra. When faced with the answer of faith, Revelation scoffed at it, deriding it as the root cause of the deaths of millions. Uriah then led his guest to the titular lightning stone, and explained the story of how his church came to be because of it. Once again the mysterious guest questioned and theorized about Uriah's claims, offering secular explanations that decry any divine interference. Their discussions went on in a similar vein, Uriah would present Revelation with one aspect of his church, which he held high as a rightful aspect to be praised, and Revelation would repeatedly and systematically dismantle it through the lenses of historical rationality, ever antagonistic towards any form of religion (McNeill).

The priest finally relented and offered to tell his guest of the event that set him on the path that led to the church. Uriah had been a willful youth, wanting to explore the world, bristling at the growing influence and enforced order of the forces conquering the entire planet. He had heard of a revolution against the Emperor and set out to join it, filled with notions of heroic rebellion and glory. The rebellion had a small victory, and amassed a force to meet the Emperor's forces in combat. However, their first engagement against the Thunder Warriors would be their last, not a battle, but a slaughter. Fifty thousand men and women, slaughtered in less than an hour, no mercy given, for the unrepentant or surrendering, they were all killed, all save for Uriah, who managed to escape the slaughter. It was at that moment of desperation that he beheld the face of god, and understood what he was to do. He returned home, which was raided and burned down in the meantime, lamented his dead family, and joined the church. His guest, naturally, moved to

explain this event in a similar manner as the explanation of the lightning stone, this time being much less antagonistic in his claims, respecting Uriah's willingness to share such a monumentally important part of his life: "'I know, but I do not revel in death any more,' said Uriah. 'The men who killed my family will have been judged by god and that is justice enough for me.' 'That is noble of you,' said Revelation, real admiration in his voice" (McNeill).

At that moment, Revelation explained that his intention with this visit was to remember what religion was like on Terra, and that the next morning religion would be gone forever. Uriah was not surprised and accepted his invitation to have one more discussion. In it, Revelation spoke of historical events, how a misunderstanding borne from religious dogma led to a war between two religious factions and thousands of people lost their lives. When Uriah retorted that such a primitive religion cannot compare to his own, Revelation turned to their own acts. How multiple crusades against the heretical have been called, untold amounts of death in its wake, how not even the members of his religion that simply opposed to slaughter were spared. Uriah's fervent claims that these were only the worst examples of his religion, and that Revelation failed to consider any of the great benefits it brought were met with denouncement, claiming that these benefits were merely stories meant to comfort and pacify, nothing granting credence or validity (McNeill).

At that point, Uriah gave up on conversing with the man in such bad faith, turning from him and demanding he either do what he came to, or leave. At that request, Revelation dropped all pretense and revealed himself as the Emperor, explaining he had come to purge the last church, but invited Uriah to join him. The Emperor's radiance filled the room, bathing the fresco above in light, Uriah marveled at the sight of vivid colours once more. The Emperor made his offer:

> "Embrace the new way and be part of something incredible. A world and a time where we stand on the brink of achieving everything we ever dreamed." . . . "Verona's work was never meant for darkness," said the Emperor. "Only in light can it achieve its full potential. Humanity is the same, and only when the suffocating shadows of a religion that teaches us not to question is gone from this world shall we see its true brilliance." (McNeill)

At that moment, Uriah saw value in Emperor's words, even if the aspects of his religion were lies, his own belief was not, and it could persist in some form even in a secular new world. Uriah followed the Emperor outside into the rain, and stared in horror when the Emperor's soldiers put the church to flame. Uriah accused him of burning knowledge, yet the Emperor brushed it aside as some things are best left forgotten, and revealed the full scale of his ambition: he would create

an Empire among the stars, free of religion, with him guiding it, even admitting that the Thunder Warriors before them were not fit for such a conquest, and that he had replacements being made. This sudden reveal of the cold, emotionless ambition tempered in rationality prompted Uriah to step away, and back into the church as it burned, saying these fateful words before he stepped inside:

> "It is a dangerous road you travel," said Uriah. "To deny humanity a thing will only make them crave it all the more. And if you succeed in this grand vision of yours? What then? Beware that your subjects do not begin to see you as a god." (McNeill)

These were the words spoken before the Crusade, before the Astartes, before even the Primarchs. The Emperor, by all notions the perfect specimen of mankind, a man with power and knowledge beyond reason, lacked this one crucial aspect, to understand humanity would crave religion, to crave both its metaphysical aspects and the community it brought.

In this short story, all the previously mentioned aspects are brought to bear, the fundamentally inhuman nature of the Emperor, the unquestioning obedience he demands, the sheer clash between his good intentions for humanity and the way he carries them out, the complete eradication of threats, and, finally, the rift between him and the needs of regular humans, which would result in the inversion of his work.

Conclusion

The Emperor could not understand the human need for religion, to him it was nothing but a danger that should be eradicated. He could see that people wanted it, but could not empathize with why. That lack of empathy extended to his troops as well, discarding the Thunder Warriors, and seeing the Primarchs as nothing but generals. His status as unfathomably superhuman served both as the cause for his good intentions and unification of mankind, but it also defined him as foreign to his people.

Despite the fact that he never claimed not to be a human, the Emperor was never a normal human, and he knew that. Because of that, he leaned into his physical, mental, and psychic supremacy to do the most good he can for humanity. He stood so far above regular humans, and he saw dangers where none could, it is no wonder he could only trust himself to lead. Yet, in doing so, he inadvertently made himself fundamentally inhuman, separating himself from the rest of humanity, becoming a character that acts like a perversion of the notion of an apex human, a human that was too detached from some of the questions that mark humanity. The question if such an entity can still be called human might not have had a definitive answer, but the sole fact that the answer was unclear caused irreparable damage. Precisely because of his absolute reliance on himself alone, and the fact he shepherded humanity with an authoritative vision, he set himself apart from regular humanity. Few could even look upon him without falling prey to sheer overstimulation of the senses. That, coupled with the fact that his methods did save millions from war and brought great progress to humanity, eventually led to people idolizing him during his active years in the Great Crusade.

Despite the fact the Emperor abhorred idolatry and superstition, his own methods left little other recourse to his subjects. He put himself forward as the only one who can save mankind, as the only human capable of leading. He also heavily modified his chosen soldiers, turning them into the instruments of absolute war. In these ways, the Emperor stood as a dark perversion of Nietzsche's notion of an apex human. One that is literally superhuman, and that literally uplifts humanity. His journey to saving the human race was a pursuit for a utopia that was built upon human supremacy that ironically resulted in a near mythological framework that would serve as foundation of the Imperial Cult.

He truly had good intentions for mankind, and strove to educate and enlighten, but he could not understand faith and brotherhood. The first of these elements would completely alienate one of

his Primarchs, who sought not simple parental guidance from him, but answers to the mysteries of the universe and saw him as an entity who could answer them, a god.

The Emperor's heavy handed approach to eradicating superstition pushed this Primarch, Lorgar, to look elsewhere for the mysteries of the universe, eventually landing in the clutches of Chaos gods. Having found his new cause, Lorgar took to dismantling the Imperium using the second key element mentioned here. He recognized the fact that the legions of Space Marines that the Emperor commanded craved genuine brotherhood, outside of camaraderie during battle, he saw the same need in his fellow Primarch Horus. To that end, he schemed and created the warrior lodges, satisfying this basic need and using it as a catalyst for ultimate heresy. He saw that the Emperor purposefully withheld these needs, and used them to further the Imperium's fall. These two elements that the Emperor shunned inevitably led to the betrayal that damned half of his Imperium and laid his own final intentions to ruin, creating an Imperium that is but a mockery of his vision. A humanity that should have evolved to a psychic race free from the zealotry and hatred he associated with religion, now is psychic precisely because of those phenomena. Humanity became a flickering flame sustained by war in an endless sea of stars, echoing the laughter of thirsting gods, as he sits rotting upon the Golden Throne, trying to hold it together with psychic might alone.

The failure of his grand scheme for humanity would come in the fact that humanity elevated him as a god, creating a religion uniting the entire Imperium, using his heavy handed methods but having none of the original goals. The end that justified the means was completely lost, leaving only the means and a radicalized echo of Nietzsche's criticism of religion.

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