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## **The Dialectics of Secularization in the Warhammer 40,000 Universe: The Insufficiency of Unbelief**

### Abstract

Warhammer 40,000 (W40K) represents one of the most influential science fiction franchises in contemporary popular culture. This article examines how W40K's narrative trajectory—from enforced atheism to theocracy—challenges both the secularization thesis and interpretations of the franchise as anti-religious. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Berger, Fromm, Jung, and Eliade, it argues that W40K presents religion as an ineradicable aspect of human existence rather than as a dystopian element. The analysis demonstrates how the franchise's treatment of religion, including its use of Catholic aesthetics and symbolism, reflects a serious engagement with fundamental questions about human religious needs and the limitations of purely secular worldviews.

### Keywords

Warhammer 40,000, Political Theology, Secularization, Religious Studies, Science Fiction Studies

### **Introduction**

Warhammer 40,000, commonly called W40K, is one of the most famous science-fiction franchises and has been at the top of the rankings of the most popular miniature games in the world for years. Created in 1987 by the British company Games Workshop, it currently includes ten editions of the original miniature wargame, over sixty computer games, several series of RPG games, several animated series (from 2021 available on the Warham-

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mer+ streaming platform), a full-length animated film "Ultramarines" (2010), individual musical works,<sup>1</sup> and several hundred novels and anthologies of short stories grouped in over fifty literary cycles, the longest and most important of which, "The Horus Heresy," has over sixty books. The advantages of Warhammer 40,000 include the recognizable, sophisticated aesthetic style created by the painter and illustrator John Blanche (born 1948), a long-time art director of Games Workshop.

Like any successful product of popular culture, W40K is a suggestive means of influencing the imagination and views of its audience. This particularly applies to popular culture brands with strong, international fan communities, and Warhammer 40,000 is one of them. It is therefore worth examining the content that it conveys, since this can potentially influence the beliefs of millions of people around the world (Crowe 2011). Of particular importance are the ideas implicit in the vision of the world presented in such works and products of popular culture.

Due to these factors, academic interest in W40K has been slowly increasing in recent years. Valuable dissertations devoted to it have also appeared at universities. Among other aspects, scholars have examined how social roles are depicted in Warhammer 40,000 (Walliss 2010; Muñoz-Guerado, Triviño-Cabrera 2018; Campbell 2023). Spiritual values in W40K have also become a subject of discussion (Moser 2019; Paradžiković 2021; Seger 2022). Harvard University has recently launched a research project on religious motifs in the Warhammer 40,000 universe and their reception in the gaming community. This attention is not surprising, as religious themes remain an important part of the W40K narrative.

The aim of this article is to identify the vision of religion promoted by Warhammer 40,000. Although we are dealing here with religion as an element of the setting in literary fictional works, I treat it analogously to religious phenomena in the real world. In the following sections, I will identify the distinctive features of religion in the W40K universe as it appears in the setting to obtain a synthetic image of it. I will then compare this image to theoretical models of religious development to determine which of them it fits. The field of my study is therefore the image of religion in a fictional popular culture universe, and I intend to analyze it more from a religious studies perspective than from a literary studies perspective, as, for example, Łaskiewicz does (2013, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Like those of the British death metal band Bolt Thrower (1986–2016), whose two albums, "Realm of Chaos" (1989) and "War Master" (1991), were entirely devoted to the subject of W40K.

## **1. The Plot Outline of Warhammer 40,000 (with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Religion in the Plot)**

Let us begin with a brief presentation of the main elements of W40K's plot structure. The action of games, novels, short stories, and more recently film productions depicts an imagined world of the future in the 41<sup>st</sup> millennium, shaped by events that took place in the 31<sup>st</sup> millennium. More than 30,000 years after Christ, the Imperium of Man<sup>\*2</sup> with its capital on Earth (now called Terra\*), ruled absolutely by a mysterious, nameless Emperor\*, approaches the completion of the armed unification of the galaxy, annexing planets colonized by humans in previous millennia. The main means of conquest are Legions composed of Space Marines\*, transhuman soldiers, led by Primarchs\*—commanders further enhanced by bioengineering, bred through unknown means by the Emperor. The Emperor's actions and abilities (including his paranormal powers) suggest that he is more than human, although he vehemently denies this.

The official doctrine of the Imperium of Man is the atheistic Imperial Truth\*: according to the Emperor's orders, humanity must finally reject belief in any supernatural forces to shape its own fate in the universe, and thus the Empire eliminates all religions on every world it conquers. The most devoted of the Primarchs, Lorgar, however, concludes that the Emperor is a true deity, not in a figurative or conventional sense. His XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion, the Word Bearers\*, introduces the cult of the God-Emperor\* on the planets they conquer. Lorgar records the basic articles of the new confession in a short treatise entitled "Lectitio Divinitatus"\*. When the Emperor learns about the deeds of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion, he destroys everything they have built; he chastises and humiliates Lorgar himself and the Word Bearers, strictly forbidding religious worship of his person.

However, the development of the new religion proves unstoppable: the cult of the Emperor as a benevolent and caring God, along with the text of "Lectitio Divinitatus," slowly spreads among the Empire's population, although imperial authorities track it down and fight it. Rejected by the Emperor in whom they sincerely saw God, shocked and despairing, Lorgar and the Word Bearers discover in the far reaches of the galaxy a living cult of Chaos\* (the Primordial Truth\*), based on the worship of the four Primal Gods\* and their demon servants. After experiencing the existence and power of the Chaos deities, the Word Bearers become their servants and, secretly from imperial authorities, begin to spread their cult.

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<sup>2</sup> An asterisk (\*) marks names and terms taken from the original nomenclature used in Warhammer 40,000.

Through a carefully planned conspiracy, they succeed in persuading Horus, the most important of the Primarchs, honored by the Emperor with the position of Warmaster\* (commander-in-chief of the imperial forces), to serve Chaos. Horus uses his popularity and authority as the second most important person in the Empire to attract a large part of the Space Marine Legions to his side. He destroys the work of galactic unification and initiates a war against the Emperor, whom he now sees as both tyrant and self-proclaimed god, standing in the way of the Primal Gods' rule.

War of unprecedented scale and brutality engulfs the galaxy. The initiative remains with Horus' rebels, who finally launch a direct attack on Terra, the capital of the Imperium and the Emperor's seat. In a pivotal battle, the Legions of Chaos storm the Imperial Palace\*. Horus falls by the Emperor's hand, but the latter emerges from the duel severely wounded and mutilated, near death. After Horus's death, the leaderless rebel Legions, pursued by the Imperium's defenders, retreat to the region of the galaxy completely controlled by the powers of Chaos, henceforth called the Eye of Terror. The dying Emperor is placed on the Golden Throne, an extremely complex machinery intended to sustain his physical life, while its form symbolizes his power and exaltation. Soon he falls into a state of sleep from which he never wakes.

Ten thousand years later, in the 41st millennium, the Emperor's withered body on the Golden Throne remains alive, though his spirit remains absent. The Imperium is shaken by anarchy and internal conflicts; it also wages many wars against external enemies. Once atheistic, it has become a theocracy with a commanded, monopolistic religion of the Emperor as the only God. Thus, the former Imperial Truth was replaced by the Imperial Creed\*, whose holy book is now "Lectio Divinitatus." The preaching and celebration of the Imperial Cult\* is managed by the Ecclesiarchy\*, the official state church to which all subjects of the Empire must belong. Previous secular institutions have taken on a religious character: after the Horus Heresy\*, the loyalist Legions were divided into Chapters\* constituting military orders. The transhuman Space Marines who serve in them receive special reverence from ordinary people, who call them "Emperor's Angels"\*. This religion functions effectively in the Warhammer 40,000 universe: the God-Emperor answers the prayers and calls of his faithful and often comes to their aid, even in visible ways. Fleets of imperial starships can safely traverse a galaxy under attack by evil forces, as their navigators are guided by the Emperor's spirit.

However, the cults of Chaos deities persist, infiltrating the Empire from below, secretly gaining new followers and making numerous attempts to seize power on individual imperial worlds. The support of the Primal Gods and their demons enables Chaos cultists to perform deeds that defy secular explanation.

## **2. A Closer Look at the Religious Elements of the Setting in the Warhammer 40,000 Universe**

Before we attempt to place the vision of religion contained in the W40K universe in a theoretical context, let us characterize its features in more detail. Unlike in, for example, the classic science fiction universe of “Dune,” first described by Frank Herbert (1920–1986) in 1965, the image of religion in Warhammer 40,000 was not created as a syncretic mixture of elements from different religious systems;<sup>3</sup> its inspirations are essentially limited to the patterns of orthodox Christian denominations. The religion shown as “good”—the Imperial Cult—most closely resembles Catholicism. The verses of *Lectitio Divinitatus* recited by the faithful during prayer gatherings show a clear similarity to the texts of the Book of Psalms or the “Anima Christi” prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola (Annandale 2014; Kyme 2016).

Ecclesiarchy is a church with a strictly centralized, hierarchical organization, headed by the Ecclesiarch, the equivalent of the Roman pope. The Imperial Creed includes the cult of saints, who in many cases reveal themselves to their followers and support them, as well as the cult of relics. As its liturgical language, the Ecclesiarchy uses High Gothic\*, a primitiveized and distorted version of Latin, the ancient language of the Western Church. An obvious reference to historical Catholicism is also the Inquisition, which fights and destroys the enemies of the faith and the Empire: heretics (including Chaos cultists and dissenters) and xenos\* (intelligent alien races).

Space Marine Chapters are modeled on medieval military orders; for example, the Black Templar\* Chapter is the visual equivalent of the Teutonic Knights. Chapters have their own clergymen, the Chaplains\*, who utilize, among other things, rosaries. The Miracle of the Blood\*, a ritual performed during the most important feast of the Crimson Fists\* Chapter (Parker 2010), is an imitation of the Catholic “miracle of St. Januarius” observed annually in Naples. The empire also uses female military orders composed of warrior nuns called the Sisters of Battle\*, visually modeled on traditional

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<sup>3</sup> See “Appendix II: The Religion of Dune” in (Herbert 2005, 573–580).

iconographic depictions of St. Joan of Arc (Campbell 2023, 51-55). Primarch Sanguinius, martyred by Horus during the Siege of Terra, mimics the appearance of traditional depictions of the Archangel Michael. Finally, in the spread of the God-Emperor on the Golden Throne and the endless torment of his body so that mankind could survive despite dangers and evil powers, one can see an imitation of the Christological pattern (combination of suffering, exaltation, and saving force).<sup>4</sup>

The Imperial Creed does not have strictly defined dogmas, for example regarding the afterlife; on such matters, its followers are divided into different schools. It is mainly focused on worship and the ethics of duty towards the God-Emperor and mankind, resembling the religion of the Old Testament in this respect. The ethics of the Imperial Creed clearly reflect Old Testament ideas: mankind sees itself as a chosen people, authorized to exterminate non-human intelligent races as enemies of the God-Emperor. On the other hand, the evil Primal Gods of Chaos are portrayed in a way typical of Christian images of demonic entities. Their followers engage in occultism, and their cults bear the features of Satanic cults: the Chaos ritual described in the novel "False Gods" (McNeill 2006) clearly resembles a "black mass," including a cruel parody of the sacrament of the Eucharist (the participants' joint consumption of the heart of a human sacrifice).

### 3. A Question about Dystopia and Criticism of Religion

Rick Priestley, the first designer of the Warhammer 40,000 universe, emphasized in an online interview that his intention was not to indict religion, and he described the result of his effort as a dystopia, i.e., a work that draws a pessimistic vision of the future, combined with criticism of the portrayed tendencies or phenomena. He also stated that he had tried to show the presence of supernatural factors in the setting as "things that may or may not be true." According to Priestley himself, the message of Warhammer 40,000 cannot be simply identified with his original ideas, because many other creators worked on the development of the franchise after him (Priestley 2019).

Nevertheless, Paradžiković (2021), in his interesting but disputable thesis, maintains that the history of the Imperium of Man should be read as "the degeneration of Imperial Truth into religious dogma," and that the actual

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<sup>4</sup> Particularly evident in a novel (McNeill 2011) which reveals that the Emperor has foreknowledge of his future torment on the Golden Throne and willingly accepts this fate in order to save mankind from Chaos. Another novel (Kyme 2016) extensively explores the motif of resurrection after entombment.

message of W40K is based on Nietzschean criticism of religion. Previously, it has been repeatedly claimed that the dystopian aspect of Warhammer 40,000 is aimed at organized and institutional religion, religion as a ruling force that justifies intolerance, hatred, and bloodshed in the name of its teachings. Remarkably, this line of anti-religious argument is presented at length in the novella “The Last Church” (McNeill 2009), in which the Emperor debates religion with the last priest before destroying the last church on Terra.

This interpretation of religious themes in W40K seems insufficiently justified. Firstly, objects of religious worship do not appear in it only as “things that may or may not be true.” The Warhammer 40,000 universe presents the interference of divine forces in the mundane world as real: characters often witness revelations or miracles performed by the God-Emperor or his saints. For example, in one of the episodes of the series “Hammer and Bolter” (2022), titled “A Question of Faith,” two Sisters of Battle devotedly defend against a horde of Chaos cultists the tomb of a martyr, who at a critical moment appears on the battlefield and defeats the attackers. In the novel “False Gods” (McNeill 2006), we find a description of the first miracle of the new religion, performed already during the Emperor’s active life: a woman, who would later be revered as one of the first saints of the Imperial Cult, through prayer to the God-Emperor, manages to exorcise a demon intruding into the world. Let us recall that Rodney Stark (1999, 265-266) in a well-known text refers to Lueba’s questionnaire on faith from 1914, which defines the “traditional” concept of God as one to whom prayer results in real interference in the world.

Secondly, the religious message of W40K cannot be reduced to criticism of religion, since the works that make up its universe repeatedly bring to the fore figures of strong men and women attached to faith, from which they draw their strength, righteousness, and nobility—such as the priest Uriah (McNeill 2009), the prophetess Euphrati (Abnett 2006; McNeill 2006; Counter 2006; Swallow 2007), the Space Marine captain Garro (Swallow 2007, 2017), Agnes, the maid of the Iron Hands\* legion (Annandale 2014), the Black Templar chaplain Grimaldus (Dembski-Bowden 2010), or Celestine, saint of the Imperial Cult (Clark 2019). Also important is the presence in the W40K universe of characters shown as honorable people who resort to prayer in the most difficult moments of their lives, such as shipmaster\* Adyssian (Kyme 2016) or Commissar\* Gaunt (Abnett 1999), the protagonist of the literary series “Gaunt’s Ghosts.” In the aforementioned novella “The Last Church,” the arguments against religion put forward by the Emperor are balanced by the arguments for religion put forward by the priest.

The aesthetics in which Warhammer 40,000 presents religion also needs to be commented on, as it is one of the elements of the W40K universe that most strongly attracts the attention of its fans and recipients of popular culture works set in it. It openly refers to the historical symbolism, architecture, and sacred art of Western Christianity. The styling of buildings, clothing, and other objects in W40K imitates and radicalizes primarily the forms of church Gothic and Baroque (the leading motif of the skull), and less often also Rococo. Reproducing such patterns in a visually exaggerated form may give the impression that the Imperial Creed and Ecclesiarchy were meant to be a parody of the (mainly) Catholic Church of the past centuries. However, the eager use of the most spectacular and characteristic elements of historical Catholic aesthetics does not necessarily prove satirical or mocking intentions. Paradoxically, this style of depiction fascinates the viewer, especially the young one (perhaps, among other things, because it depicts religion as a source of power in the broad sense of the word). It is difficult to assume that the creators of the universe were not aware of the effect they would achieve. An instructive example here is the reception of historical Catholic aesthetics in Romantic culture. The fashion for medieval Catholicism, prevalent in literature and visual arts in the Romantic era, showed it—colloquially speaking—as a religion full of spirits, a religion with sophisticated rituals, complicated symbolism, sublime incantations in an ancient language and majestic sacred architecture, and these elements did not arouse disgust but interest. Especially in comparison with simpler Protestant rituals or the “boring” and “mundane” vision of the world offered by the philosophy of the Enlightenment. As a result, a number of famous Romantic intellectuals, literary figures, poets, writers, and artists converted to Catholicism, particularly in Protestant Germany and England (see Morris 2019).

#### **4. Warhammer 40,000 Confronted with Theories about Religion**

The conclusions about the importance of religion for humanity that the Warhammer 40,000 universe offers to its audience are multifaceted. The procedure I propose to reveal them is to compare the plot and setting in W40K, including its religious threads, with widely known theories about religion present in the philosophy of religion and religious studies. This is not to suggest that the creation of the Warhammer 40,000 universe was preceded by in-depth study in these areas, as that does not appear to have been the case. Despite occasional references to Shakespeare (McNeill 2014) or William Blake (McNeill 2007), the inspirations of the W40K authors likely

do not go beyond general knowledge of history and culture based on popular sources. However, in this work of popular culture ultimately shaped by many contributors (designers, novelists, screenwriters, illustrators, and others), we can see echoes of many serious subjects from the history of philosophy and culture. For example, in one of the promotional cinematics released by Games Workshop, Warmaster Horus, justifying his rebellion against the Emperor, says "You stole power from the Gods," which brings to mind the philosophy of religion of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872). According to Feuerbach, religion develops as a product of human alienation: humans unconsciously deprive themselves of their best features and inner powers, projecting them onto the deities they create. Humanity must therefore free itself from religion to regain its spiritual values, full power, and control over itself (Feuerbach 1989). In W40K, this is what the Emperor does, at least superficially, as he builds the Imperium of Man purged of religion. However, the Emperor's attempt to suppress religious needs by eradicating religion causes them to be satisfied by demonic forces. Horus' rebellion aims to restore the rule of the Primal Gods, thus representing a reversal of Feuerbach's philosophical program, perceived here as robbery and usurpation. From another perspective, Horus' rebellion against the Emperor can be viewed as Freudian antagonism of son against father.

Let us first examine Feuerbach's thesis about the genesis of deities as human constructs. Does Warhammer 40,000 present gods and religions as products of their worshippers? The ontology of the cosmos in the fictional W40K universe would provide material for a separate text, so for lack of space I must forgo its detailed analysis here. To put it briefly, Warhammer 40,000 does not provide an unequivocal answer to this question. Some references in the works that make up the W40K universe suggest that deities feed on the worship and emotions of their worshippers; other references suggest that deities have pre-existed races of intelligent beings. In Warhammer 40,000, the objects of religious worship appear at least in accordance with R. Priestley's formula quoted earlier: as "things that may or may not be true." This means that the situation of a religious follower in the fictional world of W40K is not fundamentally different from the existential situation of a religious follower in the real world—we can risk saying that in this sense the Warhammer 40,000 universe portrays religion realistically. The deities of W40K resemble the archetypes of the collective unconscious in the psychology of C. G. Jung, who also avoided deciding whether the objects of religious worship really exist or not, while treating religion itself as a seriously causative factor in human existence. The psychologist and philosopher

William James (1842–1910) formulated a pragmatist concept of truth, according to which the criterion of truth is effectiveness in action: that which allows or helps to act effectively is true (James 1922, 2002). Religion in Warhammer 40,000 fits this concept. As an example, let us mention the religion of the Orks\*, the xenos most commonly encountered in the galaxy of the 41<sup>st</sup> millennium. Humans view Ork beliefs with revulsion, much as Christian explorers and missionaries viewed the pagan indigenous religions of non-European peoples; they call Ork deities “piggish gods.” But Ork religion works: their belief in the twin gods Gork and Mork allows them to travel through space, their spaceships to fly, and their machines to operate outside the laws of physics. The same applies to both the “good” religion of the God-Emperor and the “evil” cults of Chaos. In James’s terms, religion itself is not presented as “good” or “evil” in W40K, but it is presented as true.

Therefore, the history of the Imperium of Man transformed into a theocracy after centuries of forced atheization is certainly a polemical vision towards the “secularization thesis,” already considered falsified in religious studies (Stark 1999), according to which, along with modernization, the secularization of society progresses until the disappearance of religion as a social phenomenon. But not only towards the latter. It also challenges theories developed by prominent sociologists of religion such as Robert Bellah (1927–2013) or Thomas Luckmann (1927–2016) who, although they do not deny the durability of the most fundamentally understood religious needs, nevertheless diagnose the weakening of the communal function of religion and the disappearance of the needs for participation in institutionalized cult, replaced by people with individualized, pluralized and privatized religiosity (Bellah 1964; Luckmann 1967).

However, this does not apply to the ideas of another renowned sociologist and philosopher of religion, Peter Berger (1929–2017). According to this author, religion places human phenomena in a cosmic frame of reference, and its main function is to maintain and legitimize the social world, and therefore to prevent social anomie and defend against anarchy. The social world remains fragile, exposed at any moment to the intrusion of forces hostile to order, therefore it must be constantly established and confirmed, and the role of religion, according to Berger, is to protect individuals and social groups against this intrusion (Berger 1990, 29–41). In the Warhammer 40,000 universe, religion appears after the Horus Heresy in this very capacity: to rebuild and consolidate order in the previously atheized Imperium of Man, shaken and shattered by a terrible revolution and civil war.

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Specifically, Berger (1990, 51) defines religion as follows: he calls it “the establishment, through human activity, of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos.” It is difficult to find a description that would better fit the Imperial Creed in *W40K*, and even the similarity of the words used seems to be not accidental. Although Berger used to be one of the leading proponents of the “secularization thesis,” even then he allowed that Weberian “disenchantment” of the world related to it did not have to be an irreversible process. He believed that the world had been “re-enchanted” once in history. Catholicism did this by contrasting a renewed version of the sacred image of the universe typical of traditional (mythological) religions with the secularizing tendencies of the Biblical religion from which it originated (Berger 1990, 113-122). “In the measure that the divine transcendence was modified, the world was ‘re-enchanted’ (or, if one wishes, ‘re-mythologized’). We would contend, indeed, that Catholicism succeeded in re-establishing a new version of cosmic order in a gigantic synthesis of Biblical religion with extra-Biblical cosmological conceptions”—wrote Berger (1990, 121). In *Warhammer 40,000*, we also find a description of reversal of secularization and “re-enchantment” of the world by revived theistic religiosity.<sup>5</sup>

Threads related to religion in the fictional history of the Imperium of Man in *Warhammer 40,000*—its path from many religions to the atheistic Imperial Truth, and from the latter to the Imperial Creed—direct the reader’s reflection especially to the issue of religious needs. Are they permanently inscribed in the essence of humanity, or can they be overcome through processes of intellectual development and increase in material wealth? Erich Fromm (1900–1980) answered the first question in the affirmative. Speaking as a psychologist and philosopher from a purely secular perspective, Fromm (1955, 21) concluded that “There is indeed no culture of the past, and it seems there can be no culture in the future, which does not have religion in this broad sense of our definition.” He defined religion as “any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion” (Fromm 1955, 21). Human religious needs should therefore be treated as ineradicable. According to Fromm (1955, 25), “There is no one without a religious need, a need to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion,” and some religion is always a way of satisfying this need, regardless of the level of mental devel-

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<sup>5</sup> On the strategies of “re-enchanting” the modern world by militant religions, see (Kepel 2004).

opment prevailing in each era. In the W40K universe, this explains mankind's adoption, despite previous atheization, of the belief in God-Emperor: "It gives a frame of reference and a unifying principle of devotion" (Fromm 1955, 30), and these needs after the crisis of the Horus Heresy and the breakup of the Empire must have intensified.

Fromm distinguished two types of religion: authoritarian religion and humanistic religion. He emphasized, however, that both may occur within the same religious system or denomination. Authoritarian religions emphasize the dependence of human fate on deity and are based on the ethics of obedience and a code of commands and prohibitions. Humanistic religions put at the center the idea of human dignity as a divine creation and the sublimity of their existence, affirm their creative abilities as gifts of god, and lean towards the ethics of love for one's neighbor and solidarity (Fromm 1955, 34-38). The Imperial Cult in Warhammer 40,000 combines elements of both authoritarian and humanistic religion in the sense used by Fromm. On the one hand, it emphasizes mankind's dependence on the protective God-Emperor, and its ethics create a system of strict commands and prohibitions, including commands to be hostile to apostates and to fight the enemies of the Imperium. On the other hand, it proclaims the ideas of the purity of mankind, the mission of humanity, and sacrificial solidarity towards others.

Fromm therefore considered the needs he classified as religious to be irreducible to other needs. Thus, he treated religion as a result of human species characteristics. Similar findings were reached by scholars who saw the sources of religious phenomena in the permanent structure of the human psyche. Such an approach would, of course, explain why mankind had to return to religion regardless of the development of knowledge (including science) and despite a long period of planned secularization. The representatives of this approach included another psychologist and philosopher, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). This author assumes (Jung 1960, 4) that "Religion, as the Latin word denotes, is a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed the 'numinosum', that is, a dynamic existence or effect, not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it seizes and controls the human subject, which is always its victim rather than its creator."

For Jung, such impulses come from the human unconscious, from which they reach consciousness. In this way, the individual comes into contact with forces that exceed their capacity to comprehend, and at the same time seeks to guide them, because "the unconscious mind is capable at times of assuming an intelligence and purposiveness which are superior to actual conscious

insight." This fact is a "basic religious phenomenon" (Jung 1960, 45-46). The religious attitude consists in opening oneself to this influence of the unconscious and in a kind of trusting submission to it, through which the individual gains support in their confrontation with the world. Such entrustment to forces beyond individual consciousness also leads to gaining or regaining a sense of meaning in life. This Jungian theory of religion in the W40K universe is well illustrated by the novel "The Flight of the Eisenstein" (Swallow 2007), whose protagonist, Space Marine captain Garro, initially an atheist loyal to the orders of the imperial authorities, slowly comes to the conclusion that the universe is ruled by a force beyond human consciousness and perception. Moreover, he realizes the existence of evil forces and the need for protection against them, which eventually leads him from atheism to theistic belief in God-Emperor and mental prayer—through numerous trials similar to those that saints undergo in traditional hagiography: suffering, doubt, humiliation, and even demonic temptation.

In addition to Jung's conception, we can recall the "homo religiosus" theory by perhaps the most famous historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), according to which "living as a human being is in itself a religious act" (Eliade 1984, vi). According to Eliade (1984, v), religion in its essence consists in giving meaning to the world and its particular elements. The world without this meaning is "the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous, meaningless appearances and disappearances." However, for meaning to be perceived by people as lasting and real, it must have its source in "irreducible" reality: "Human life becomes meaningful by imitating the paradigmatic models revealed by supernatural beings" (Eliade 1984, vi).

Eliade calls the source of meaning "the sacred"; according to this author, religion is not always about "belief in God, gods, or ghosts" but always about "the experience of the sacred" (Eliade 1984, v). Eliade (1984, vi) considers religion understood in this way to be a permanent feature of the human condition: "It suffices to say that the 'sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness" (Eliade 1984, v). When we apply this to the Warhammer 40,000 universe, we see that initially the Emperor, through his attempt to completely separate mankind from religion and the sacred, leaves it facing a meaningless world. The Chaos cults, despite their perverse characteristics, provide meaning in the form of Primordial Truth. However, humanity finds a source of meaning by rediscovering the sacred in the supernatural being of God-Emperor and is thus able to oppose Chaos.

## Conclusion

The Warhammer 40,000 universe conveys a rather conservative image of religion and its role in individual and collective human life, consistent with the ideas of religious theorists such as P. Berger, E. Fromm, C. G. Jung, and M. Eliade. In this image, the attempt to secularize the universe ends in failure, and religion may be “good” or “bad” but ultimately emerges as a necessary, lasting aspect of existence. Religion responds to needs that are permanently inscribed in the essence of humanity, and only it can satisfy these needs. It allows humans to structure their vision of the universe and explains to them the meaning of its structure. It protects people and their world from destructive chaos. It gives humanity orientation in the order of the universe and a sense of unity with this order. Through religion, a person entrusts themselves to suprapersonal forces, and as a result, gains a sense of security in the universe and a higher meaning and purpose in their life. The attempt to build a society free from religion must end with the adoption of one form of religion or another (of which both the Imperial Creed and Chaos are examples in W40K).

Religion in Warhammer 40,000 is not an element of the setting intended merely to enhance the sense of horror or eeriness. The W40K universe does not portray religion in a caricatured or polemical way. Religion is presented here seriously, that is, as religion is perceived by the followers of religion themselves. Even if it is created only by humans, religion “works”: it exalts humanity.

The way religion is presented is therefore not a dystopian element in Warhammer 40,000. W40K can indeed be considered a dystopia, but in the sense that it presents a vision of the future in which humanity’s attempt to control the universe based solely on reason, science, technology, and enlightenment—and the rejection of belief in a supernatural reality—leads to crisis and catastrophe. Religion emerges as a force to overcome this crisis. It is not shown as a mere manifestation or tool of human hubris, but also as an antidote to it.

As a final observation, it would be worth reconsidering the validity of classifying literature created as part of W40K as popular culture in the pejorative sense, i.e., as shallow literary production of a purely entertainment nature, devoid of serious subject matter. In fact, the novels of Dan Abnett, Graham McNeill, Nick Kyme, Aaron Dembski-Bowden, James Swallow, and others also contain questions and considerations fundamental to human existence – like the science fiction novels of Stanisław Lem, Arthur C. Clarke, or the Strugatsky brothers before them.

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