

THE PATH OF TRUTH & VIRTUE

20 Questions with the High Church of Messiah-as-Emperor

A Yellow Band Profile from The Prism Network

By Morton Frederick, freelancer

The largest cathedral of the Messiah-as-Emperor on Yakiyah is located in Tanez, the planet's largest city. The cathedral is made of carved stone bricks and marble slabs, a stark contrast to the prefabricated towers and domestic buildings constructed by the Alternative Cultivation Renovation Economy (A.C.R.E.) which make up most of the architecture of Yakiyah. Within the church there are several massive vaulted rooms, lit by a combination of dim artificial lights and architectural tricks that redirect ambient light from outside. The Empire's faithful come here from every corner of Acheron Rho, one of the most popular places of worship in the sector.

The day I attended a service on Yakiyah members of the Houses Major and Minor sat alongside common imperial citizens and Directors from A.C.R.E.. It was hard not to feel that everyone sitting there was equal before the Messiah, separated not just by social standing but by our baser imperfections that keep us from God's grace.

As is true in every church of the High Church of Messiah-as-Emperor, the main chamber is supported by ten massive pillars, each made from a different material, each pillar representing one of the Ten Virtues. The Ten Holy Virtues are the cornerstones of the High Church, laid out by the Messiah, the living reincarnation of the Holy Emperox.

THE TEN HOLY VIRTUES

FAITH
PROPRIETY
JUSTICE
FORTITUDE
WISDOM
TEMPERANCE
DILIGENCE
CHARITY
INTEGRITY
HOPE

The Ten Holy Virtues are moral principles all faithful adherents of the High Church are expected to pursue and uphold.

That day's sermon on Yakiyah was an introduction and review of the Ten Virtues, and was performed by three members of the High Church: High Priest Callixtus Pius, High Inquisitor Purist Pelax, and Exarch Purist Batukhan Alexander. I sat and spoke with High Priest Pius and High Inquisitor Pelax after the sermon to get a better idea of what the High Church teaches and where they find themselves at the beginning of this tumultuous year.

Morton: "What would you say is God's relationship to the faithful?"

High Inquisitor Purist Pelax: "God, the Creator, is the divine soul, the perfect being that we seek to emulate. Due to the nature of humanity, we fall short of that perfection. It is then that God sends us the

Messiah, the Emperox, who through their example shows us how best to live the Ten Virtues. So the glory of the Emperox, and the glory of the Empire, becomes an example for the rest of humanity to follow, down the path of truth and virtue."

Morton: "And this is done through reincarnation, is that correct?"

High Inquisitor Purist Pelax: "Yes, in part. The Emperox, as the emissary of God's will, is assimilated into the Divine when they leave this plane. They lead the perfect life, and therefore have no need to reincarnate back into the world. Those of us without that honour, come back again and again, each time seeking to perfect ourselves so that we may one day attain the same Divinity."

Morton: "Much religious dialogue these days centers on the role of the soul and consciousness. You seem to be concerned with personhood, especially in contrast with synthetic and alien life. I was wondering if the High Church could speak further on this?"

High Inquisitor Purist Pelax: "The Church's position has remained consistent: only a human can attain perfection. Machinery, no matter how finely assembled, can never achieve the perfection found in the Ten Virtues. Some in the church may take it further than that. For example, my order, the order of the Purists, believe this extends not only to synthetic life but also to all non-human life. For the Church, this is a central, core belief. Perfection is only attainable for humanity."

The service on Yakiyah had a comforting rhythm. One of the priests would explain a few of the Ten Virtues and then the faithful would be given time for quiet contemplation in whatever manner they saw fit. For some this took the form of silent supplication or meditation in the pews of the church. Others visited one of the Church's many confessionals to discuss their sins and doubts anonymously with members of the clergy, receiving guidance and repentance in return. A few memorable pauses in the

sermon were interspersed with communal singing.

But for some of the faithful, this sermon did not have the intended effect of calming the spirit and focusing on the Virtues. Some citizens were clearly ill-at-ease being so close to the nobility, and exchanged a few curt words during fellowship after the ceremony was complete.

Ever since the Decommission Order there has been a sense of general unrest in the Tsatsos system. Many farms on Yakiyah are unattended and fallow. Those who previously had positions in A.C.R.E. managing synth workers have been left without employment and are forced to take lower paying jobs or move on to other systems. This combined with growing food prices have resulted in a notable rise in anti-imperial rhetoric in the system, public criticisms of A.C.R.E.'s business practices, and new alternatives to the age-old truths of the High Church.

In the streets of Tanez there are pamphlets and flyers for a new philosophical movement called the Friends of Yakiyah, advocating egalitarianism and nonviolence and accusing the High Church of lacking in these principles. Some of these Friends believe the soul inhabits all organic life, even plants and animals. Others identify as atheist, choosing to believe in no God at all. I asked the High Priest Callixtus Pius about this sense of spiritual unrest among imperial citizens.

Morton: "In my research I noticed that the High Church has several branches, for example there are Reformists, Karmists, Observers, Purists, all with varying beliefs and responsibilities. Taking into account groups like the Church of Humanity, Repentant, is the High Church worried at all that we will see more groups splinter off from the faith?"

High Priest Callixtus Pius: "The main thing that separates our branches from the Church of Humanity, Repentant is that they have rejected both the Emperor as Messiah and the Ten Virtues. The Branches of

the church may disagree on doctrinal specifics but all are united under the Ten Virtues. It is worrying to see people leaving our congregations but for the moment it is a minority, and I am assured many will return to our love.”

Morton: “I don’t envy you having to keep track of it all.”

High Priest Callixtus Pius: “That is where being branched is somewhat of a help. The branches are not artificially manufactured, but more an organic product of the diverse peoples the Empire contains. My own order is dedicated to the conservation of history. As a High Priest of my order I need only worry about those priests working under me to that aim. The Exarchs have the hardest task, interpreting and reconciling these differing pre-Scream primal traditions.”

Morton: “What is the High Church’s position on equality and violence?”

High Priest Callixtus Pius: “In terms of equality through egalitarianism: although it may seem like a way to create an equal society nobody can be truly equal. Some will be stronger, some will be smarter and eventually in a system like that the strongest and smartest will take control. We have two paired virtues in Propriety and Charity. Propriety speaks to being content in your station in life and not being overly ambitious. Charity speaks to not accepting being lower than your station in life, about helping those who have lost that which they were born with. By looking at both of these virtues we can conclude that when we are born into a given station, which may be noble, citizen, or clergy, we should seek to be content in that station, and not seek to move higher with great ambition nor accepting lower than that station God has given us - not letting yourself move backward through laziness or misfortune. Work hard in service to the Empire in the station you are given and you will be rewarded.

Morton: “And nonviolence?”

High Priest Callixtus Pius: “Violence is unpleasant. It is not a tool that we should be quick to use as an empire. I will admit in the past the High Church itself has led crusaders against enemies of the empire, and will likely continue should threats arise in the future. In terms of using violence to settle your own personal disputes I urge everyone to follow the laws of our Empire. Violence is not inherently wrong. In the same way money or political power is not inherently wrong. As the sacred texts state “a great love of money is a source of evil deeds.” So too is any overly strong love of something an avenue for us to falter. We should seek to only use violence when absolutely necessary to secure the empire rather than quickly using it whenever we are mildly inconvenienced. The High Church would always seek guidance from the Emperox before ever preparing to do battle.”

Before I returned to Echo to write this article I briefly visited Andophael, sole planet of the Sig system, and home of the High Church. The planet is covered in mountains of snow and ice, many carved by the High Church to resemble previous High Exarchs and incarnations of the Messiah. Due to the constant freezing temperature of the planet, many of Andophael’s inhabitants live underground, except for the hundreds of pilgrims that visit the holy planet every day.

These members of the faithful come to Andophael to walk the Path of Virtue, a winding trail that begins outside the massive primordial crater that houses the High Church’s Grand Temple. For hours upon hours they brave the cold and treacherous rocky path, testing their bodies and their minds, all to seek greater perfection in this life or the next, seeking a path closer to God.

Thank you to everyone at The Prism Network, and the members of the High Church of Messiah-as-Emperor including High Priest Callixtus Pius, High Inquisitor Purist Pelax, Exarch Purist Batukhan Alexander, as well as Friend Altara Fox, FoY.