

Torturers as priests

The Urth list — 9 messages, 4 voices, 02 Jul 1998

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mary whalen — 02 Jul 1998, 18:46

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

It seems to me that the original form of the torturers guild was the Roman Catholic Priesthood. Gene Wolfe has said that he believes Jesus Christ was actually a torturer, and that God created pain for a purpose.

They wear black, live in what has often been compared to a symbolic church (the spaceport puts people in contact with "heaven").

There are many different kinds and orders of religious men named in the books, but it is all unorganized. Also, all of these might have only come about after the arrival of the Conciliator. The torturers say that they are much more ancient than the Conciliator.

Also, when Palaemon and Gurloes are asking Severian if he wishes to enter the guild or leave, they immediately compare being an initiate of the Seekers for Truth and Penitence (a religious-sounding title if I ever heard one) to being an epopt (initiate) of religion. Then they tell him the final secret of the guild.

Severian later reveals part of the secret when he leads the lake people against Baldanders's keep. He says the only purpose of the torturers is to obey, immediately after a long speculation about his knowledge of the Increate (God) and his relation to Him. The main purpose of the Church is to serve.

It seems quite likely to me that the RCC, over the huge span of history separating Earth from Urth, became the torturers guild, as the world changed.

prion

Jason Voegele — 03 Jul 1998, 00:43 · follows mary whalen

prion wrote:

It seems to me that the original form of the torturers guild was the Roman Catholic Priesthood. Gene Wolfe has said that he believes Jesus Christ was actually a torturer, and that God created pain for a purpose.

Now that's an interesting and very plausible theory. Just before reading this post, I was reading a passage from TBOTNS that ties in nicely with the Torturers as Priests theory. It's from SHADOW, ch. XI, paragraph 10 ("The Feast") describing the festivities of the Feast of Holy Katharine:

"She stood between the wheel and the sword while Master Palaemon (as the older of our masters) told us of the founding of the guild, and of our precursors in the years before the ice came--this part was different each year, as his scholarship decided. Silent she stood too while we sang the Fearful Song, the hymn of the guild, which apprentices must get by heart but which

is sung only on that one day of the year. Silent she stood too while we knelt among the broken pews and prayed."

The fact that the history of the guild is mentioned in the same passage as "we knelt among the broken pews and prayed" is a bit much for coincidence, especially for the Loop the Lupine school. The fact that the pews are broken could suggest the decay of the Church into its corrupted form of the torturer's guild, or it could just harken to the fact that the pews are very old and the Church has decayed over time.

Jason Voegele

mary whalen — 02 Jul 1998, 23:17 · follows Jason Voegele

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

I just thought of the fact that the Autarch Ymar ordered that the female Jailers/torturers no longer be allowed to be members because of their cruelty. This seems a pretty strong reason supporting the torturers-are-priests theory. It symbolizes that there are no women priests in the RCC.

I'm glad Jason Voegele and I agree on this one.

prion

Matthew Malthouse — 09 Jul 1998, 02:19 · follows mary whalen

mary whalen wrote:

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I'm glad Jason Voegele and I agree on this one.

I find that the logic fails me here.

The existance of women in the order is a difference that distinguishes it from the priesthood that we know. Lacking any history between times the presence of women in a previously all male hierarchy is inexplicable.

More generally: the development of priest as torturer isn't too far fetched, it's happened before after all. But what has become of the theological and liturgical functions of the priesthood?

The Order has its ceremonies in the Citadel chapel in contrast to the Archivists who use the city cathedral. While this is seen as a mark of distinction at the time it would imply a theocratic structure over which the order did not have any control or influence which strikes me as odd.

How does the order stand in relation to the other guilds attached to the citadel such as the witches? Are they all remnants of clericals? The question is prompted because Sev. sees a spiritual aspect to the order, but that strikes me as a late development. Falible memory puts me at risk here but my impression of the order in the time of Ymar was that they lacked any such

aspect and I take Mstr Pal's unquoted (and apparnetly variable) history of the order at the ceremony to be a developed mythology rather than a plausible explication of origins.

The order serves. Yet it's origin might as well been in a secret or military police and intelignce force.

Matthew

mary whalen — 09 Jul 1998, 01:28 · follows Matthew Malthouse

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

Matt, I just added this as part of some of my previous posts of the theory that the torturers are the Urth form of Catholic priests.

If they can change from being priests to being torturers, it seems that along the way they could have evolved to include women in some incarnation(s) of their function, and we don't even know if the women had differing roles in the past. I meant also that the fact that they originally had no women (as priests), gained them (as jailers), and then lost them again (after becoming torturers) is part of the cyclic/repetitive structure Wolfe likes to use.

I also think this theory is part of the fact that Wolfe purposely writes the plot and setting of New Sun to be an amalgam of every SF cliché and standard there is. A well-known current organization that changes form in the far future to an ironic form is one of these.

Lastly, I just read on the Whorl archive list that when Gene Wolfe was asked the question of "Is there a past, current, or future member of the Order of Seekers of Truth and Penitence on the Whorl?", he says "Yes, Silk. " I take it to mean that Silk is a member of this order because he's a priest/worshipper of the Outsider (God), and this seems to indicate that the torturers are, too.

prion

mary whalen — 09 Jul 1998, 01:23 · follows mary whalen

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prion

Matthew Malthouse — 09 Jul 1998, 19:04 · follows mary whalen

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That's fine. But while one is searching for evidence to support a theory filling the lacunae with "it's a long time, anything could have happend" seems a little less than rigorous.

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But note that the gender roles in the Whorl are differentiated in a manner reminiscent of the church today. That doesn't appear to be the case with the torturers of Ymar's time.

Is the equation of Silk with a torturer one of formal function or role performed?

Matthew

Michael Straight — 09 Jul 1998, 17:19 · follows Matthew Malthouse

On Thu, 9 Jul 1998, Matthew Malthouse wrote:

The existence of women in the order is a difference that distinguishes it from the priesthood that we know. Lacking any history between times the presence of women in a previously all male hierarchy is inexplicable.

Aha! The torturer's guild descends from Episcopalians!

-Rostrum

Michael Straight — 09 Jul 1998, 17:24 · follows Michael Straight

On Thu, 9 Jul 1998, mary whalen wrote:

Lastly, I just read on the Whorl archive list that when Gene Wolfe was asked the question of "Is there a past, current, or future member of

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"Yes, Silk.

" I take it to mean that Silk is a member of this order because he's
a priest/worshipper of the Outsider (God), and this seems to indicate
that the torturers are, too.

I always interpreted that remark as Wolfe playing with the ambiguity of the phrase "Seekers of Truth and Penitence." Silk is literally such a seeker in the sense of seeking truth and his own penitence, whereas for the torturers guild it's somewhat of a euphemism (although literally true for them too).

Also, the "all men are torturers" theme gives Wolfe lots of wiggle room.

-Rostrum