

The Immaculate Philosophy

Consider the humble farmer and the fertile hen.

It's the way of the farmer to tend to her fields, her animals, and her family; her just reward is the fruit of her labor and the honor of her family. It's the way of the hen to provide from her body, in the form of egg, flesh, and chicks; her just reward is the shelter and feed of the farm. The farmer, secure in her place, respects and nurtures the lesser creatures in her care. The hen, secure in her place, honors and obeys the farmer that cares for her. So it is from earth to Heaven: The lesser creature shelters beneath the greater, and gives honor and obedience in return. At Creation's heights, the Princes of the Earth. In its depths, the plants and creatures of the soil. When all see to their duties, all prosper, and Creation prospers with them.

Consider, then, the unmindful fox. It's the way of the fox to hunt vermin, to keep the wilds from being overrun, and to fill his belly. Yet if the fox shuns perfection and steals from the henhouse, then all is in disorder. The fox will become lazy and neglect his duties, and the vermin of the wild will run rampant. The hen will be gone before her time, and produce no more for the farmer that nurtured her. The farmer will lose her hens, or else must turn from her fields, animals, and family to set traps for the fox. The fox will be caught in time, and the stolen hen will weigh down his soul as he journeys to his next incarnation. It's better, then, for the perfect farmer to gird her yard, so the fox cannot reach her hens. In this way, the farmer follows a perfected life, and guides lesser creatures toward their own enlightenment.

This parable demonstrates the Immaculate Philosophy's central tenet. There's a structure to the universe, a celestial blueprint for all things laid down in the Immaculate Texts and disseminated by the Order's monks. This divine hierarchy calls upon all beings to honor, serve, and sacrifice for their superiors, and to provide protection, respect, and guidance to their inferiors. In striving to perfect the station given by the Elemental Dragons, every individual refines her own enlightenment, and will reincarnate into a new life where her station's fortune and influence reflect the improved quality of her soul. In denying or falling short of her station, she sows discord, tragedy, and confusion, and will reap these fruits in future incarnations.

Heretical Worship

The outer Threshold teems with cults that defy every Immaculate tenet of right worship, and secret cults spring up even on the Blessed Isle. Immaculates refer to these cults collectively as the Hundred Gods Heresy, and hold a sacred duty to anticipate, uncover, and destroy such heretical worship. This is difficult, particularly in satrapies with rich religious histories and divine mythologies. Many cults go underground, while others syncretize Immaculate concepts. The Immaculate Order has centuries of experience stamping out illicit worship. Monks in the Realm ban and destroy iconography that could lead mortals to false worship, use public duels to settle questions of doctrine, and stage raids on heretical assemblies with expert coordination and intelligence.

The Order must also contend with Immaculate heterodoxies, various sects whose beliefs undermine the Immaculate Philosophy's orthodoxy. These include the Pure Way of Prasad (p. XX), the ghost-veneration of the Intou heretics of the northern River Province, and the Sisterhood of Pearls' Five Insightful Criticisms, as well as heretical worship of the Immaculate Dragons in the Realm.

Mortals are forbidden to worship the Dragons directly. While Dragon-Blooded are encouraged to revere the Immaculate Dragons and permitted occasional prayers or offerings to them, the Order roots out organized cults worshiping the Immaculate Dragons, imposing punishments appropriate to cultists' beliefs, actions, and degree of repentance.

The most common such cults are dedicated to Sextes Jylis. Peasants pray to him for children in barren marriages or for succor in times of famine, while tantric cults devoted to him come and go within the Dynasty. Mela follows close behind, worshipped as a legendary warrior and wise sage, especially in the legions. Daana'd receives veneration from sailors and coastal communities as a sea goddess; she's also occasionally claimed as a patron by transgender, nonbinary, and genderfluid worshippers, as she's a transgender woman herself. Pasiap is revered as a spiritual teacher, patron of architects, and guardian against Anathema. Mortals rarely worship Hesiesh, other than children believing his mastery of Essence can grant them Exaltation, but Dragon-Blooded may tread into heresy as they pray to him for self-discipline and restraint.

One of the smallest, yet most persistent Immaculate heresies is the Heresy of the Antitheses, which crops up among this or that prefecture's peasantry every few decades. It teaches that the Immaculate Dragons will return to Creation, reinvested in flesh as their Antitheses — the Unworthy Babbler, the Illiberal Churl, the Sickly Whore, the Inconsiderate Horseman, and the Ostentatious Peasant. Whether the returned Dragons come to punish the wicked or to herald the world's end varies between iterations of the heresy. Adherents worship the Dragons' negative aspects as holy devils, hoping their prayers will turn aside the Antitheses' punishments or earn a reprieve from doomsday.

History and the Order

The Immaculate Order functions as the largest source of historical and academic inquiry in the Realm, perhaps in all Creation. Monks collect, study, and transcribe the world's history in a vast collection spanning hundreds of monastic and temple libraries. Many tales of Creation's lost days hide in monasteries rarely seen by laity, their contents dispensed at the Order's discretion.

Popular myth states that the Immaculate Order was born when the Elemental Dragons incarnated to lead the Dragon-Blooded in glorious rebellion against the demonic Anathema, raising the Dragon-Blooded to their rightful place as Princes of the Earth. This view of history suffices for most lay mortals, and even for incurious Dragon-Blooded, whose station doesn't demand the full truth. Once a monk has received sufficient spiritual preparation, she learns a more nuanced history: that the Immaculate Order was founded during the Dragon-Blooded Shogunate, that the Immaculate Dragons' great deeds are allegories condensed from dozens of historical Dragon-Blooded across various time periods, and that the Solar and Lunar Anathema are Exalted themselves, though doomed to insanity.

Though it's a constructed religion, the Immaculate Order is *well*-constructed and requires minimal historical revision to function. The Sidereals planned for the Immaculate Texts to face millennia of scrutiny by a dynasty of highly educated demigods, and risked only lies that couldn't be directly tested. Perhaps some being in Heaven or Hell witnessed Sidereals pen certain Immaculate Texts, or knows the true purpose of reincarnation, or saw Creation formed by a hand other than the Elemental Dragons', but if so they've never proven their claims. Where knowledge is sparse, faith suffices.

Social Control

The Immaculate Order has one goal: force Creation's civilizations into its philosophy's idealized order. To accomplish this goal, the Order must shape and perfect every level of society, using social engineering techniques set forth in the Immaculate Texts. They trace every ill and unrest to spiritual failures lurking in the Perfected Hierarchy and root out the disharmony they deem responsible. To this end, the Order collects and controls information, as accumulation of wisdom makes the Order suitable to guide those who have none.

The Immaculate Order is the single greatest source of basic education in Creation. Millions credit Immaculate monks for their knowledge of the world and its history. Monks transcribe thousands of books every year, many of which travel to temple libraries accessible to the public. While the Order

freely provides knowledge, it also controls what information is publicly available. The Order unhesitatingly bans heretical or controversial media — books, songs, iconography — from public consumption. Monks who uncover banned materials have them destroyed publicly, often by the very people who made or kept them. The relative truth that banned materials contain is immaterial compared to their potential for social unrest, and the Order expects its monks to realize this. Monks sometimes retain copies of banned works to better understand the threat they pose, while Dragon-Blooded are considered spiritually elevated enough to keep and use banned materials as they see fit.

Fiction in the Realm often uses the monk as a plot device for revealing the truth. In the monk's presence, other characters find their best-kept secrets coming to light by the Dragons' will. This archetype is a benign reflection of the Immaculate Order's voracious collection of intelligence. Every monk learns to provide detailed reports on her activities and interactions, and particularly vigilant or insightful monks are prized. Many monks excel at collecting valuable confessions; others investigate criminal behavior or send the faithful to spy on hidden cults. Rare investigators earn the title of inquisitor, and wield special authority to investigate apostasy in the Order's heart.

The Immaculate Order doesn't simply collect information, nor does it share everything it learns with temporal governments. The Order uses or doles out secrets in exchange for allies and influence, or acts decisively in cases of heresy and immediate danger to the social order. Often this means coordinated violence, or even a call for a Wyld Hunt. Kinder monks prefer to educate mortals who've been led into heresy and show them the errors in their dogma. Others execute heretics without pause, confident the dead will face the Dragons' judgment and receive a fitting reincarnation. Satrapial governors and police learn either to support the Order's activities or to stay out of the way, for the Order carries the trust and backing of the Dragon-Blooded.

Unrest, Protest and Uprisings

Sometimes order breaks down. Confusion can arise at any level of the Perfected Hierarchy; social obligations become muddled. Corruption in the Immaculate Order's ranks can lead to abuse, heresy, and feuds between monks. Peasants suffering droughts or disasters may seek to take by force the prosperity the Order promises its faithful. Dragon-Blooded often fail to rule with the virtue, wisdom, and skill expected of their elevated spiritual position. Most often, each of these factors influences and exacerbates the others.

The Immaculate relationship with civil unrest is complex. Monks have suppressed or mitigated countless uprisings, but they've also allowed or led dozens of revolts across the Realm's history. The Order demands that the weak obey the powerful, but also expects rulers to provide a basic level of care for the peasantry. When obedience brings only suffering and starvation, civilization cannot function and the Order must set things right.

If governors, generals, and princes close their hearts to the Immaculate Order's words, the Order doesn't deny their authority, but rather silently censures the corrupt. When censure brings redoubled impropriety rather than responsibility, the Order turns to nonviolent protest. Tracts, posters, and sermons remind society of the proper order of things. Monks lead strikes or march in ominous silence through the streets. Mortal monks faced with unacceptable orders from Dragon-Blooded respectfully refuse. When nonviolent methods receive violent responses, Immaculate monks defend themselves, lending their legendary martial skills to righteous causes and teaching the meaning of propriety by force.