

# **Sir Thomas Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal* and the Justification of Violence**

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2009

## **Abstract:**

This thesis argues that the sixth book of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the *Tale of the Sangreal* introduces a new idea of chivalry to the knights of the Round Table and challenges them to reform how violence is justified in Arthurian society at the fundamental level. The central issue revolves around the knight's intentions as they are confronted with situations of violence. In the Grail quest, each knight must demonstrate that he uses his knightly skills for the benefit of the community, not for his own purposes. By contrasting how knights justify violence in terms of Arthurian ideals, which privileges the use of violence for individual gain, with how knights justify violence in terms of Christian ideals, which privileges the use of violence to protect the community, this thesis demonstrates why Arthurian civilization collapsed as civil war engulfed the kingdom.

Furthermore, the thesis shows how the *Sangreal* interacts with the rest of the *Morte Darthur*. It asks the knights to give up their worldly pretensions to honour and courtly privilege, and to reform their lives radically to comply with Christian ideals. This is achieved as the Grail journeys of the three Grail knights, Perceval, Bors, and Galahad, and the journey of Lancelot are examined closely, producing the spiritual biography of the knights. To demonstrate how far Arthurian civilization had moved from Christian ideals, the final chapter scrutinizes Arthur's estrangement from God in the early years of his reign.

These investigations make it evident that the *Sangreal* acts as a mirror for the *Morte Darthur*, proposing a better way of being within the chivalric world by closely analyzing the justification of violence within that world. This demonstrates that the collapse of Arthurian civilization is unavoidable.

**Dedication:**

To my mother, father, and grandmother

## **Acknowledgements:**

This thesis would never have come to fruition without the dedicated and patient support of my supervisor, Professor Diane Speed, through every part of this process. Professor Speed's efforts always went above and beyond the call of duty. There are many other people whom I wish to thank, including Associate Professor John Pryor for allowing me to attend his lectures on the First Crusade to gain a clearer understanding of the thesis's historical context, Gabrielle Singleton for her diligent proof-reading, and Dr Fred Jefferies for his ever ready and willing ear. My thanks must go also to Professor Rhonda Griffiths and Professor Maree Johnson for giving me time to complete my thesis when I could have been doing many other things. I would like to thank all my family, friends, and work colleagues for their love, friendship, and understanding throughout the entire period of my postgraduate work.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Chapter One: The Context Of Malory's <i>Sangreal</i>	33
Chapter Two: Sir Perceval Of Galis	71
Chapter Three: Sir Bors De Ganys	101
Chapter Four: Sir Galahad: The Haute Knight	128
Chapter Five: Sir Lancelot Du Lake	159
Chapter Six: Arthur: King Of All Britain	190
Conclusion	222
Bibliography	225

## Introduction

This thesis argues that the sixth book of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the *Tale of the Sangreal*, introduces a major shift in the understanding of how violence is justified in the *Morte Darthur*. I argue that this shift is so central to the entire text that it explains why Arthurian civilization collapses amidst the chaos of civil war. Although the discussion of the text's presentation of violence has been a central point in the critical reception of the *Morte Darthur*, there is a significant gap in the critical examination of how the very different form of knighthood and chivalry found in the *Sangreal* interacts with the knighthood and chivalry found in the rest of the text. Although I am emphasizing the importance of the *Sangreal* to an overall reading of the *Morte Darthur*, I acknowledge that this text cannot be interpreted fully through one monolithic point of view. I will build my argument from this particular case but this does not discount other readings of the entire text.

My particular reading will demonstrate that, in the *Sangreal*, violence, or in Malory's favoured terms such as outrage, deeds, or prowess, is justified only when the knight's inner motivation accords with Christian ideals as he confronts potentially violent situations. These Christian ideals demand that the knight use his knightly skills only in the service of God, to protect a Christian community. If a knight is aligned with these Christian ideals, he does not commit an act of violence to profit himself. Thus, the Christian knight can never allow himself to be motivated to fight by a desire to win personal honour or worship, to profit from his opponent, or to enact revenge. In the *Sangreal*, if a knight is motivated to fight for personal gain or vengeance, he demonstrates that he does not have an acceptance of Christian ideals, and this lack of understanding is a marker of his alienation from God. Of course, in earlier books of the *Morte Darthur*, especially those portraying the life of knight errantry such as the Tales concerning Lancelot, Gareth, and Tristram, Malory certainly celebrates the worldly form

of chivalry. But I argue that, if a reader comes to the *Morte Darthur* initially via the *Sangreal*, it is a spiritual or Christian form of chivalry that gains prominence.

The importance of Christian ideals of violence to an understanding of the *Sangreal*'s vital role in the *Morte Darthur* is demonstrated by investigating the journeys of the major knights in the *Sangreal*, Perceval, Bors, Galahad, and Lancelot. This investigation shows how each knight comes to his personal view of the proper Christian use of violence. Each, with the exception of Galahad, begins his journey in the Grail quest having been alienated from God because he has placed his allegiance in Arthurian civilization. During each knight's Grail journey, the knight will face a series of trials in which he comes to understand that, if he is to be successful in this quest, his true allegiance must be to God. The knight demonstrates his allegiance by using his prowess only when the motivating force behind his violence is in accord with Christian ideals. Although, historically, Christianity in the medieval period cannot be understood in this monochrome manner, I am using this definition of how violence should be justified to examine the spiritual journey each knight undertakes in the Grail quest. The purpose of simplifying these Christian ideals is to provide a basis from which the different chivalric ideals found in the *Sangreal* can be differentiated from the chivalric ideals found in other books of the *Morte Darthur*. It is from this platform that I will argue that the *Sangreal* and its presentation of knighthood and chivalry are central to an understanding of the entire *Morte Darthur*. The Grail legend, as Malory presents it, is the spiritual heart of the entire text and, if the entire *Morte Darthur* is read from this point of view, the spiritual ideal of knightly conduct emerges as highly desirable.

The *Sangreal*'s centrality to the entire text is confirmed by a physical examination of the Malory manuscript, the earliest known version of the text, because nearly every time the word 'Sangreal' appears in the manuscript it is rubricated or written in red ink.<sup>1</sup> The only other words rubricated consistently are the names of the knights. Helen Cooper discusses

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, 'Malory manuscript, Additional MS 59678 (Digitalised Version) by Humi Project, Keio University', (London: British Library, 2003). The word 'Sangreal' is not rubricated when the Grail appears to Perceval and Ector on folio 334.

how the rubrication of the knight's names calls attention to the names, creating a roll of honour.<sup>2</sup> By implication, the rubrication of 'Sangreal' shows its importance to the overall text because it draws attention to this adventure, singling the Grail quest out from the other adventures of the knights. Although this physical feature has not been included in the text since the work was first printed by William Caxton in 1485,<sup>3</sup> the *incipit* at the beginning of the *Sangreal*, and retained in modern editions, emphasizes its importance by describing it as a Tale:

briefly drawn out of the French which is a Tale chronicled for one of the Truest and one of the Holiest that is in this world.<sup>4</sup>

However, this thesis examines a specific theme of the *Sangreal*, the Christian principles of justified violence from a textual point of view, and demonstrates how important this theme is for an overall understanding of the *Morte Darthur*. The starting point of any discussion about the justification of violence in Malory's text is to examine how violence in the *Morte Darthur* has been received in its critical reception and this begins with the text's first editor, the printer William Caxton, and his preface to the first printed edition in 1485.

### **The Critical Reception**

Since the first printing of the *Morte Darthur* in 1485, its presentation of violence has been a significant factor in its critical reception. This critical review will examine this issue in four chronological phases. First, the review evaluates the earliest commentators to discover how they used the issue of violence either to recommend or to discourage the reading of the text by emphasizing how violence affected its moral worth. Second, the review investigates how commentators in the nineteenth century began to look at the text from a literary rather than moral point of view. Third, the review examines how

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Cooper, 'Opening up the Malory manuscript', in *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of the Morte Darthur*, ed. Robert L. Kindrick and Michael N. Salda Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 255-284, 273.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Le morte d'Arthur*: printed by William Caxton, (London: Scholar Press in association with the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1976). Produced in facsimile from the original edition printed by William Caxton in 1485.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P.J.C. Field, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1990, 846. All further references will be to this edition and will be cited in the body of the text to page and line number.

commentators interpreted the justification of violence in Malory's direct source, the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, to examine historical influences on the text during the twentieth century. Once this has been completed, the review of the critical reception can return to Malory's *Sangreal* and examine how commentators over the last thirty years have looked at the *Sangreal's* position within the entire *Morte Darthur*, and whether or not its justification of violence has influenced their readings.

### **Critical Reception to Late Nineteenth Century**

There was little specific comment about the *Sangreal* in the reception history of the *Morte Darthur* until the late nineteenth century. The earliest commentators tended to focus on the *Morte Darthur's* overall moral worth as expressed through the knights' behaviour. In his Preface to the first edition, Caxton urges his readers, whom he describes as the many diverse gentlemen who have urged him to print a book about King Arthur,<sup>5</sup> to see the entire book as an exemplum of both proper and improper chivalric behaviour.<sup>6</sup> His exhortation,

Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shal brynge you good fame and renomee,<sup>7</sup> assumes that the *Morte Darthur* is a text that can teach noble men the noble acts of chivalry. The reader may see good deeds for which knights were honoured or shameful deeds for which knights were punished as they lost their reputations to shame and were reprimanded. To support his contention that the *Morte Darthur* is a text that teaches proper chivalric behaviour for noblemen, Caxton lists the attributes and activities of the knights of the Round Table as 'chivalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, hardynesse,

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<sup>5</sup> Caxton begins his Preface to the first printed edition by explaining that he printed the *Morte Darthur* because 'many noble and dyvers gentylnen of thys royame of Englonde camen and demaunded me many and oftymes wherfore that I have not do made and enprynte the noble hystorye of the Saynt Greal and of the moost renommed Crysten kyng, first and chyef of thre best Crysten, and worthy, kyng Arthur, whyche ought moost to be remembred emonge us Englysshemen tofore al other Crysten kynges'. See William Caxton, 'Caxton's Preface', in Malory, *Works*, cxliii.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas H. Crofts, "'Thynges Foresayd Aledged': Historia and Argumentum in Caxton's Preface to the *Morte Darthur*,' in *Re-Viewing Le Morte Darthur: Texts and Contexts, Characters and Themes*, ed. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, *Arthurian Studies* 60 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 49-64, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Caxton, 'Caxton's Preface', cxlvi.

love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murder, hate, vertue and synne'.<sup>8</sup> Even though the list mixes obviously good attributes with obviously evil attributes and activities randomly, it does recognize a substantial variance in the behaviour of the knights. From its earliest printing, the *Morte Darthur* has been seen as a text that presents the attributes and activities of the knights as being variously good and evil.

Whereas Caxton portrays the *Morte Darthur* as a positive influence in the lives of noblemen, despite presenting material that shows the knights doing evil as well as good, Roger Ascham, writing under the influence of humanism and the Reformation in the middle of the sixteenth century, accuses the text of being a corrupting influence on its readership because of the manner in which violence is presented. He says that the *Morte Darthur* is a text inhabited by knights who, although noble, do commit homicide without sufficient justification, as well as committing adultery by deception. Ascham was concerned that the text would affect adversely the wealthy and young men and women who lived in idleness.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Caxton, who saw the *Morte Darthur* as being morally improving because the readership could learn from both the successes and the failures of the knights, Ascham was worried that reading such a book could lead to depravity. It is of interest that two early commentaries immediately identify the *Morte Darthur*'s presentation of violence as the key to the text's moral worth or lack of it, and thus regard it as educational literature. Such a perception influenced who the commentators believed made up the text's intended readers.

Ascham's scathing comments had a lasting effect on the popularity of the *Morte Darthur* and William Stansby's 1634 edition was the last printing for two hundred years. The neo-classical literary tastes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries judged Malory's text harshly because of the behaviour of the knights. A mid-eighteenth-century commentary found in the *Biographia Britannica* and credited to William Oldys (1696-1761) criticizes Malory because the knights are not in command of their passions and behave

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<sup>8</sup> Caxton, 'Caxton's Preface', cxlvi.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London: Bell and Dandy, 1863), 81-82.

adulterously.<sup>10</sup> Although this does not judge the moral worth of the text in relation to the presentation of violence, the focus on the sexual immorality of the knights has implications for how the text was viewed. It was no longer regarded as a text that had the educational value for its readership suggested by Caxton. It was viewed as light entertainment for readers who were morally suspect. Samuel Johnson's view of the *Morte Darthur* as comprising only stories filled with adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments, further positioned it as into being simply light entertainment.<sup>11</sup> His comments dismissed any suggestion that the *Morte Darthur* could be a vehicle for a serious discussion of how violence was justified. Occasions of violence within the text were now placed within the world of fantasy and would be read only by those whose lack of education made it impossible for them to be exposed to other more edifying texts such the classical literature of the ancient world or more modern literature of Europe. This readership constructed by Johnson lacked the necessary skills to judge whether or not the *Morte Darthur* was good literature. Johnson's comment further removed the *Morte Darthur* from Caxton's notion that it was a morally improving work because only indiscriminating readers, who delighted in the magical and enchanting aspects of Malory's work, would read it.

Johnson demonstrates the eighteenth-century bias towards privileging the classical heritage in literature and denying any literary value could be found in the romances of the Middle English period. Another commentator, Thomas Warton, took another tack in his *Observations on the Faerie Queen of Spenser* and showed that the prized literature of the Early Modern period was influenced by Middle English romance. This encouraged others to take a fresh look at Malory's work and to re-evaluate the text's value by examining the text's sources. He acknowledged Malory's influence by demonstrating how Spenser directly modelled characters such as Tristan on Malory's characterizations.<sup>12</sup> This new

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<sup>10</sup> 'Biographica Britannica', in *Malory: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Marylyn Jackson Parins (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to His Edition of the Plays of W. Shakespeare', in *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. George Steevens (London: Otridge and Rackham, 1824), li.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Warton, *Observations on the Faerie Queen of Spenser*, 2nd edition, 1 (London: printed for R. and J. Dodsley, J. Fletcher, Oxford: English Short Title Catalogue, 1762). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.

evaluation led to two of the most interesting and positive assessments of the *Morte Darthur* in the early nineteenth century, one from Sir Walter Scott and one from Robert Southey. Both intended to produce new editions of the *Morte Darthur*, and their comments on the work mark a watershed in the discussion of the critical reception of the *Morte Darthur*. Major authors, editors, publishers, and scholars were beginning to perceive the *Morte Darthur* as a major work of Early English literature, and, despite the earlier accusations about its moral integrity and value as an educational tool, its suitability for wide-ranging readers was recognized.

### **The Early Nineteenth Century**

Sir Walter Scott's initial reaction to Malory's text was brutal. In a letter to Richard Polwhale dating back to 1804, Scott described it as 'an awkward abridgement of prose romances, themselves founded on more ancient metrical lais and gests'.<sup>13</sup> Later, however, he changed his assessment radically writing in his *Essay on Romance* that 'Sir Thomas Mallory, indeed, compiled, from various French authorities, his celebrated *Morte d'Arthur*, indisputedly the best Prose Romance the language can boast'. He countered Johnson's claim that the *Morte Darthur* was of no educational value because it was not related to Classical or European literature, by identifying its sources as French. He went some way to repudiating the claim that the *Morte Darthur* was morally suspect by writing to Southey in 1809 that he intended 'to reprint namely the whole [*Morte Darthur*] from the original Caxton which is extant with all the superstition and harlotrie which the castrator in the reign of Edward VI chose to omit'.<sup>14</sup> Scott's comments demonstrate that he considered the *Morte Darthur*'s literary, rather than moral, value, first, by promising to include all the material left out since the time of Ascham because it was regarded as morally corrupting, and, second, by identifying the basis of Malory's text in older European literature.

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<http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/servlet/ECCO>, 16-17, accessed 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2007 at 10.30am.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Walter Scott, as quoted in *Malory: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Marylyn Jackson Parins (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1988), 77-81.

<sup>14</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Essays on Chivalry, Romance and the Drama*, Chandos Classics (London: Frederick Warne, 1887), 80-106.

Once the literary, as distinct from the moral, worth of the *Morte Darthur* was foregrounded, Robert Southey, Scott's contemporary, planned an edition to include the first systematic attempt to identify Malory's sources by compiling a history of King Arthur and the Knights of Round Table drawn from the Welsh and French sources. Although his completed edition of the *Morte Darthur*, published in 1817, was a reprint of the Caxton *Morte Darthur*, his highly influential and extensive introduction discussed the use of violence in the text, countering the earlier negative assessments.<sup>15</sup> Southey argued that Middle English romance writers were moderate in their descriptions of violence because the European Middle Ages were full of violence. Southey placed the issue of violence in its historical context but, like Caxton, he saw the *Morte Darthur* as a text that could educate its readership in how violence can be used in a proper manner. He demonstrated the *Morte Darthur*'s educational value by suggesting that it was suitable reading for boys, if the orthography were modernized.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, by naming the text's sources, claiming it was based upon French romances such as *Lhystoire du Saint Graal* and *Le Second Volume du Saint Greall* [*Vulgate Estoire and Queste*], Southey, like Warton and Scott, presented the *Morte Darthur* as worthy of scholarly assessment. Discussions of the justification of violence in the critical reception of the *Morte Darthur* could be examined through its historical sources without reference to contemporary moral standards.

### **The Grail Legend's Connection to Crusading Ideology**

Once the *Morte Darthur* as a whole was generally recognized as worthwhile literature, commentators turned their attention to the individual tales within it. They looked specifically at the *Tale of the Sangreal*, searching through the French, Welsh, and German versions of the legend for source material. In 1888 Alfred Nutt produced the commentary *Studies on the Legend of the Grail*. He concluded that the original source of

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<sup>15</sup> Parins, ed., *Malory: The Critical Heritage*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Southey, *The Bryth, Lyf, and Acts of Kyng Arthur; of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, Theyr Merveyllous Enquestes and Aduentures, Thachyeuyng of the Sanc Greal; and in the End Le Morte Darthur, with an Introduction and Notes by Robert Southey*, I (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, Paternoster-Row, 1817), xxviii-xxx.

the Grail legend lay in Welsh and other Celtic texts. Although he questioned Malory's judgment of the source material for the *Sangreal*, saying that the author chose the longest, most wearisome, and least beautiful versions of the tale, he led a significant advance in Grail scholarship by taking an historical rather than literary or moral view of the legend.<sup>17</sup>

This historical approach connected the Grail stories to the crusades and the issue of justified violence. Nutt argued that the driving force behind the popularity of Arthurian literature was the memories of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the source materials of Malory's version of the *Sangreal* were first compiled. Nutt traced this connection by showing how Geoffrey of Monmouth's depiction of the reign of Arthur in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca 1138)<sup>18</sup> reflected the spirit of the times in which it was written. It looked back to the first crusaders, who had conquered Jerusalem and been exposed to the Tales of Araby the Blest and Ophir the Golden, which described the wars with pagans (as Nutt called the Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem) and the sorceries of the east. These memories made the story of Arthur appear true. This was an age, Nutt wrote, that required a special literature, and such triumphs could be celebrated by adapting Celtic tales to that spirit.<sup>19</sup> The adaptations of the Celtic tales he was referring to were the early Welsh and Irish tales he associated with the Grail legend.

In his study Nutt identified the major strands of commentary that proceeded to dominate criticism throughout the next hundred years. Nutt argued that the Grail legend presented a view of chivalry that was distinctly spiritual in its orientation, a strand of criticism that

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<sup>17</sup> Alfred Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail with Especial Reference to the Hypothesis of Its Celtic Origin* (New York, NY: Cooper Square, 1965), 236.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Wright, 'Introduction', in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: Brewer, 1984), xii. Wright argues that Geoffrey had begun his work before 1135, but says it must have been finished by 1139 because Henry of Huntingdon states in his *Epistola ad Warinum* that Robert of Torigni showed him a copy of the *Historia* when Henry was visiting Le Bec in 1139. See Henry of Huntingdon, *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 582-583. In the Latin, 'Quorum si prolixitatem desideras, librum grandem Galfridi Arturi, quem apud Beccum inueni, queras'. In the English, 'If you would like them at length, you should ask for Geoffrey Arthur's great book, which I discovered at Le Bec.'

<sup>19</sup> Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, 229.

surfaces again in the twentieth-century critiques of Malory's source for the *Sangreal*, the French *Queste del Sainte Graal*. An understanding of how critics view the French *Queste*'s relationship to crusading ideology is inherently significant when considering how the justification of violence is presented in Malory's *Sangreal*.

Much of the twentieth-century commentary on the *Queste* concerned the discovery of both the origins of the Grail legend and the historical context of the French source. Commentators argued for a context that connected the work to the debates that surrounded an ideology that was developed to justify the West's involvement in the crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although Nutt had previously proposed this line of investigation, the French commentators did not look to the Celtic sources to find the origins of the Grail legend. Instead, they searched for its origins in Cistercian theology, which was intimately connected to the early development of crusading ideology. The main source identified lay in the writings of the highly influential and most famous member of the order, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.

The key text for these commentators' interest in Bernard was almost certainly his treatise *In Praise of the New Knighthood*.<sup>20</sup> Written in 1135, it defined two categories of knighthood. One was inspired by the monastic principles of Cistercian reform, and the other by the secular concepts of knighthood based on the courts of many European sovereigns. The treatise praised the monastic style of knighthood but condemned the secular style. It was written to gather support for a new military order, the Templars, who had come into being in the Holy Land after the First Crusade. Albert Pauphilet and Étienne Gilson examined the internal evidence found in the *Queste* and compared it to their knowledge of the Cistercian order and the theology of Bernard.

Albert Pauphilet, in his 1921 study of the *Queste*, argued that the inspiration and perhaps

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1977). All references to this text will be quoted in the English from this edition and will be cited to page number in the body of the text. The original Latin will be quoted in the footnotes and will come from 'De Laude Novae Militiae', in *Œuvres Complètes, XXXI*, ed. Pierre-Yves Emery (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990).

authorship of the romance was monastic and Cistercian. The Grail legend, as it was presented in the *Queste*, was an allegory of man's search for God. His work is still considered valid, but Karen Pratt has examined and modified his view that the authorship was Cistercian.<sup>21</sup> Étienne Gilson argued in 1934 that the theology of the *Queste* was connected to the mystical theology of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Gilson argued that the *Queste* presented its readers with a search for the goal of Bernard's mystical theology, an ecstatic union with God.<sup>22</sup> He argues in his explanation of Cistercian theology that French courtly literature was preceded and accompanied by many theological explorations of love and states that this movement was initiated by three groups of theologians, which included Bernard and his Cistercian contemporaries. Although a full explanation of Gilson's ideas is beyond the scope of this critical review, it is important to note that a major scholar has connected the idea of a quest for God's love with the development of the knightly romances.<sup>23</sup>

Sister Isabel Mary continued this line of commentary, arguing in 1976 that Cistercian thought influenced the author of the French *Queste* and that its purpose was to displace the popular romance literature, based on the ideal of courtly love, with a literature of popular appeal based on the ideal of the love of God. She connected the *Queste* to Cistercian theology by arguing that it presented the life of a Christian as being nothing less than a perpetually renewed response to the divine love of God himself and she connected this theme with Bernard and the Cistercian school. The voice common to religion and knighthood was to be found in the *Queste*'s depiction of a Christian chivalry because it provided a metaphor that applied equally to the knight and to the monk. By

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<sup>21</sup> Karen Pratt, 'The Cistercians and the *Queste Del Saint Graal*,' *Reading Medieval Studies: Annual Proceedings of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies in the University of Reading*, 21 (1995), 69-96, 72.

<sup>22</sup> Étienne Gilson as cited in Fanni Bogdanow, 'An Interpretation of the Meaning and Purpose of the Vulgate *Queste Del Saint Graal* in the Light of the Mystical Theology,' in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance : Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford : A Tribute by the Members of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society*, ed. Armel H. Diverres Alison Adams, Karen Stern and Kenneth Varty, *Arthurian Studies* 16 (Cambridge: Boydell, 1986), 23-46, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1940), 2.

describing monastic life in military terms, as well as describing knightly behaviour in monastic terms, the distinction between the two was collapsed and both knight and monk were, in effect, *milites Christi* or ‘soldiers of Christ’. Sister Isabel Mary described the *Queste* as expanding this metaphor into an allegory in which the world was conceived as a battlefield and every man was engaged in a personal struggle for holiness. This, argued Sister Isabel Mary, had already occurred with the development of the military orders, whose very nature was shaped by the writings of Saint Bernard and the early Cistercian order.<sup>24</sup>

In 1979 Pauline Matarasso also interpreted the French *Queste* through a monastic and scriptural light refracted in the lens of Cistercian theology. Examining the biblical allusions throughout the text, Matarasso came to the conclusion that allegory was the only technique through which the author could illustrate spiritual truths in a fictional form to produce a morally edifying literature. She stated that the ‘reward promised in the *Queste* to those who seek with a pure heart is endorsed by the testimony of scripture mediated through the allegory’. This assessment comes into line with those earlier writers who insist on Cistercian authorship of the text, when Matarasso says that the author was ‘aiming at a universal statement ... that man’s true end is the desire for and ultimate possession of God’.<sup>25</sup>

Fanni Bogdanow agrees that the author of the *Queste* not only drew upon the scriptures for inspiration but also turned to the moral and mystical thoughts of Bernard. In 1986 she argued that the purpose of the text was to encourage the readers to turn away from evil by presenting ‘the rewards they might expect if they heed God’s call to repentance and ... the dire consequences that await them if they fail to do so’.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, Bogdanow connected the critique of violence and chivalry in the *Queste* with the collapse of the

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<sup>24</sup> Sister Isabel Mary, ‘The Knights of God, Citeaux and the Quest of the Holy Grail’, in *The Influence of Saint Bernard: Anglican Essays with an Introduction by Jean Leclercq OSB*, ed. Sister Benedicta Ward (Oxford: SLG Press, 1976), 53-88, 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> Both quotations are from Pauline Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste Del Saint Graal* (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 242-243.

<sup>26</sup> Bogdanow, ‘An Interpretation of the Meaning and Purpose of the Vulgate *Queste Del Saint Graal* in the Light of the Mystical Theology’, 26.

Arthurian civilization following Arthur's battle with Mordred.

In 1995 Karen Pratt took a different view. She argues against Cistercian authorship of the *Queste*, stating that 'despite the moral and religious didacticism of the *Queste*, the romance presents us with the mystical glorification of an elite group of fighting men, bound together by lineage and the conventions of the 'ordre de chevalerie'. Her final word on the matter best illustrates her particular point of view as she concedes that the author may have had a foot in both the monastic and the secular world, and realized that knights had much to learn from their cloistered brothers. This author gave 'the greatest role in Christian providential history since the Incarnation to a knight'.<sup>27</sup> Although Pratt denied its Cistercian authorship, she allowed that the *Queste* presents knights who give their primary allegiance to God and fight for spiritual principles. In her view, in fact, the *Queste* is a text that examines how violence might be justified.

Richard Barber analyzes the *Queste* from an historical point of view and finds that the secular ethos of the knight had its origins in the church's attempt to involve itself in secular life.<sup>28</sup> Poets created and celebrated a world of glittering courts and knights that served their king politically and their lady emotionally. Barber says that the church utilized attitudes to knightly violence to develop theories about what constituted a 'just war'. He uses Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood* to describe the church's attitude to violence because it outlines the life of a knight in the military orders and describes how the prowess of the warrior was harnessed for the service of religion. He says that the *Queste* presents a series of adventures that are tests of spiritual strength in which the knight must accept grace if he is to succeed. This disciplined world of the knight reflects the spiritual world of the Cistercian monk and makes the quest of the Holy Grail the spiritual climax of the Arthurian stories. Barber describes in historical terms how the *Queste del Sainte Graal* depicts how a knight uses violence in the service of God.

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<sup>27</sup> Pratt, 'The Cistercians and the Queste Del Saint Graal', 88.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Barber, 'Chivalry, Cistercianism and the Grail', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover, *Arthurian Studies* 54 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 3-12. For the remarks noted in the paragraph see pages 4-7.

These readings of the *Queste* demonstrate that the text is infused with religious and military metaphors showing how any Christian can return to God. Malory's revision of the *Queste* takes a different point of view. Malory was a knight, not a cleric nor theologian, and, although the *Sangreal* presents an adventure that takes the knights through a spiritual landscape and requires them to pass spiritual tests if they are to succeed, its purpose is to present a form of chivalry alternative to that practised in the earlier books of the *Morte Darthur*.<sup>29</sup> By introducing this spiritual alternative to Arthurian chivalry, Malory has placed his own critique of Arthurian knighthood into the *Morte Darthur*, giving, as this thesis will demonstrate, an explanation of how the Arthurian world eventually became so self-destructive. Unlike the *Queste*, which presented a spiritual path that all might follow, Malory's *Sangreal* presented a new spiritual chivalry that only knights could follow.

There are other important strands of commentary that connect the Grail legend to other aspects of the justification of violence by examining the earlier versions of the legend. As noted above, Alfred Nutt connected the legend with the First Crusade, arguing that it had, in part, inspired Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and had therefore transmitted Arthurian literature to all of Europe. He saw a literature that revelled in the glories of war. In 1960 Helen Adolf reversed this idea, arguing that the first known written text to mention the Grail legend, Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal*, presented a different crusading ideology, that the legend inspired faith in the miraculous victory of the First Crusade, and that it should continue to do so even after the loss of the Holy Sepulchre when the Christian forces were defeated in 1187 at the Battle of Hattin.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Margaret Bradstock argues that Malory's *Sangreal* rejects the Cistercian polemic but believes that a worldly knighthood could become a metaphor for the spiritual knighthood of the *Queste*. See Margaret Bradstock, 'Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*: The Culmination of Tradition', *AUMLA* 68 (1987), 207-232, 208.

<sup>30</sup> Helen Adolf, *Visio Pacis: Holy City and Holy Grail: An Attempt at the Inner History of the Grail* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1960), 11-17.

Stephen Knight reiterated this by arguing that the Grail story was a mythic fiction that sought to compensate for the loss of the holy places in Jerusalem. This compensation, according to Knight, was explained in terms of the Eucharist because, even if the place of Christ's death and resurrection in Jerusalem were lost, the Holy Presence can be created anywhere at the moment of transubstantiation. Knight finds this movement of a geographical location of the Holy Presence to an universal location presented in Robert de Boron's forerunner to the Arthurian Grail story, known as *Joseph d'Arimathie* or *Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*. He argues that Malory's source, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, is linked to the Fourth Crusade, and that the introduction of the perfect knight, Galahad, is the ultimate sophistication of the Grail tradition. This 'Christ-like' character represented views of the Fourth Crusade held by the pope and other ecclesiastical authorities who criticized the lovers of booty. This, as Knight notes, is the tale that has come down to the modern world, with its rejection of earthly values and its prizing of a noble and Christianized chivalry.<sup>31</sup> Again, it is this tradition that has been handed down to Malory and which appears in the *Sangreal*. Malory's portrayal of Galahad as the epitome of chivalric excellence in the Grail quest sets the standard for the other knights to follow.

What makes Adolf's and Knight's comments about the *Queste* even more remarkable in relation to the *Sangreal* is that they help to explain the importance of the penitential theme in the Grail legend. It can be argued that the stories of Bors's and Lancelot's Grail quests represent two penitential journeys: one, involving full penitence, is a success because Bors is invited to join the Grail fellowship, and the other, involving partial penitence, is a partial success because Lancelot receives a partial view of the Grail ceremony. However, this penitential theme in the *Sangreal* is presented in a manner different from this theme in the *Queste*.

Mary Hynes-Berry explains this difference by stating that Malory did not see the central

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Knight, 'From Jerusalem to Camelot: King Arthur and the Crusades', in *Medieval Codicology, Iconography, Literature, and Translation: Studies for Keith Val Sinclair*, ed. Peter Rolfe Monks and D.D.R. Owen (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 223-232.

disjunction found in the French *Queste* between worldly and heavenly chivalry. Instead, she argues that being a good knight made him also a good Christian, and chivalry is treated as a vocation, one founded in patience and humility.<sup>32</sup> According to Hynes-Berry, Malory is not describing an ideal spiritual chivalry but a chivalry to be practised in the light of Christian values, even if it does not fully live up to the ideal. But, having put in place this disjunction between the ideal and the actual, Malory has given the knights of the Round Table a standard by which the other knights can explore their past motivations for violence and seek to do penance for harm caused. What this exploration of the Grail legend and its connection to the crusades suggests is that it is not so much that the events of the crusades themselves that are encoded in the various versions of the Grail legend as that the ideology of the crusades has been appropriated into the story of the Arthurian civilization.

Although many commentators since Nutt have specifically cited the crusades and the background Cistercian theology as the historical inspiration of the Grail legends, commentators on Malory's *Sangreal* have observed its affinity with the *Queste*. In the commentary devoted to *The Tale of the Sangreal* in the third edition of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* produced in 1990 by revising the former editions by Eugène Vinaver, this tale is described as being translated more closely to its original source than any other Tale in Malory's text.<sup>33</sup> But Vinaver's assessment of the tale in Malory's version in comparison with the French *Queste del Saint Graal* led him to conclude that Malory's revision of the French original changed the nature of the tale. In Vinaver's view, Malory's version could no longer be described 'as a means of contrasting earthly and heavenly chivalry and condemning the former,' it was 'an opportunity offered to the

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<sup>32</sup> Mary Hynes-Berry, 'A Tale Breffly Drawyne Oute of Freynshe', in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer, *Arthurian Studies* 1 (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1981), 93-106, 95-102.

<sup>33</sup> Vinaver as quoted in Malory, *Works*, 1534. Although there has been scholarly debate about how Malory revises the *Sangreal* from its source, the *Queste*, I take the position of Eugène Vinaver that the *Sangreal* is the least original of all the books in the *Morte Darthur*. Other commentators such as Sandra Ness Ihle examine the difference between the two texts based on the actual representation of the Grail, but, in my opinion, Malory's revisions to the *Queste* do not affect the overall thrust of the argument in this thesis that the presentation of how violence should be justified can be traced back to Bernard's ideal of the new knight.

knights of the Round Table to achieve greater glory in this world'.<sup>34</sup> Vinaver argues that Malory secularized the story of the Grail. Vinaver's various comments about the purpose of Malory's Grail story set the agenda for much of the commentary that surrounded both the *Morte Darthur* and *The Tale of the Sangreal* for many years to come.

### **The Question of Structure**

One of the most controversial assertions made by Vinaver in 1947 was that the various tales of the *Morte Darthur* were separate entities. He based this claim on the Malory manuscript found in Winchester College by librarian W.F. Oakeshott in 1934 but he does not explain how he reached this conclusion in his Preface to his edition of the manuscript. Having decided that the *Morte Darthur* was comprised of eight separate tales, he suggested that commentators should look to the merits of each tale rather than to the entire text as a focus of their commentary. This was debated in the commentary throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Vinaver believed that this manuscript was a more complete and authentic version of the text than Caxton's printed edition because the manuscript was closer to what Malory had written. He proceeded to assert that the single book produced by Caxton was not representative of the author's intention, which was to produce a series of eight separate romances.<sup>35</sup> Vinaver's conception of Malory's work as eight separate tales, rather than as one complete entity, led to his decision to rename the entire work as *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Because this thesis argues that the *Sangreal* is central to an understanding of the entire text, it is important to follow the thread of this particular argument and assess whether or not the *Morte Darthur* is one text or a series of eight different tales.

In 1964, a collection of critical essays, *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of the Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Roger Lumiansky, was published with the express purpose of arguing against Vinaver's assertion. In his Introduction, Lumiansky wrote that Malory's final objective in writing the *Morte Darthur* was to produce one entire text and that each

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<sup>34</sup> Vinaver as quoted in Malory, *Works*, 1535.

<sup>35</sup> Vinaver, 'Preface to the First Edition (1947)', in Malory *Works*, ix.

author in the volume would examine the primary purpose of one tale.<sup>36</sup> Charles Moorman observed that the *Sangreal's* role in the *Morte Darthur* was to foreshadow the eventual destruction of the ideal secular civilization that Arthur attempted to create. Malory, Moorman argued, was maintaining the religious tone of the *Queste* rather than secularizing it because in his pared-down versions of the hermit's explanations, Malory presents the religious core of each argument. The objective of maintaining the religious messages of the *Sangreal* and their relationship to the rest of the *Morte Darthur*, he argued, can be found in the treatment of the sins of the Round Table and of the Grail knights: the generalized sins of humankind found in the French *Queste* have in the *Sangreal* become the specific sins of the individual knights. The example Moorman uses to illustrate this is Lancelot because, according to Moorman, he continues to be the best of the worldly knights in the *Sangreal* as he has been throughout the earlier tales. If, as Vinaver claims, the Grail is the greatest adventure of Arthurian civilization, its greatest knight, Lancelot, should be successful in the Grail quest. Lancelot's failure, as Moorman expresses it, epitomizes the failure of the Arthurian system, because his sins embody the system's sins, which lead to the destruction of the society.<sup>37</sup> By acknowledging the *Sangreal's* overall purpose in the *Morte Darthur*, Moorman effectively opposes Vinaver's assertion that the tales in the *Morte Darthur* are separate entities. He also demonstrates the importance of interpreting the meaning of the *Sangreal* through the knights involved in the quest to show that the Tale reveals the reasons for the eventual destruction of Arthurian civilization.

Stephen Knight takes a middle view between Vinaver and Moorman by arguing that the *Morte Darthur*, or the *Arthuriad*, as he renames the text, has several different kinds of structure.<sup>38</sup> He pinpoints the *Tale of Lancelot and Elaine* found in Book 7 of the *Morte Darthur* as the place where Malory commits the rest of the text to being a narrative about

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<sup>36</sup> R.M. Lumiansky, 'Introduction', in *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of the Le Morte Darthur*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1964), 5-20, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Moorman, "'The Tale of the Sankgreall': Human Fraility," in *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1964), 184-204, 187-192.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Knight, *The Structure of Sir Thomas Malory's Arthuriad* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1969), 94.

Lancelot and he recasts the entire text as a ‘developing tragedy of Lancelot’s consciousness’.<sup>39</sup> Knight argues that this tragedy is concerned with the love triangle between Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur, but this thesis argues that the destruction of Arthurian civilization occurs more importantly because the lesson of how violence should be justified, as shown in the *Sangreal*, was not subsequently incorporated in the chivalric outlook of the court of Arthur.

D.S. Brewer continues Moorman’s line of argument when he asserts that the *Morte Darthur* is a single entity, not just a collection of eight tales. He suggests that looking at the *Morte Darthur* to find the same structural unity found in a modern novel was misleading; instead, he uses the term ‘cohesion’ to describe how the tales are unified.<sup>40</sup> Cohesion is a grammatical term that refers to the linking of the parts of an extended piece of writing through signals such as verbal echoes or the repetition of various themes.<sup>41</sup> Brewer explains the cohesion of the *Morte Darthur* as a particular ‘unity of tone and atmosphere and the continual moral concern of a special kind’.<sup>42</sup> Brewer expands his argument saying that Malory is a ‘traditional writer’, or a writer who knows a particular story in many versions. He creates unity in a work through personal relationships, held together by traditional moral values such as loyalty. All these personal loyalties link together to form a stable society. It follows that in a traditional fictional world, as created by Malory from his many and varied sources, where everything is connected with everything else, if one area collapses everything else will fall with it.<sup>43</sup> Whether the *Morte Darthur* is one entire book or a series of eight individual tales, the entire work is unified by a central moral code found throughout the ‘hoole book’. This view represents the compromises in the debate about unity and structure that recent commentators have accepted.

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<sup>39</sup> Knight, *The Structure of Sir Thomas Malory’s Arthuriad*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Derek Brewer, ‘The Hoole Book’, in *Essays on Malory*, ed. J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 41-63, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Geoffrey Leech, Deuchar, Margaret and Hoogenraad, Roger, *English Grammar for Today: A New Introduction* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982), 163-166.

<sup>42</sup> Brewer, ‘The Hoole Book’, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Derek Brewer, ‘Malory: The Traditional Writer and the Archaic Mind’, in *Arthurian Literature*, no.1, ed. Richard Barber (Woodbridge and Totowa, NJ: Brewer; Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), 94-120, 95-113.

P.J.C. Field gives another view of the unity of the *Morte Darthur*. He uses internal evidence from the work to show that Malory intends it to be the whole story of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. He argues that the readers can find Brewer's cohesion in the many minor characters, the internal unity of the plot, and in the symmetry of the rise and fall of Arthurian civilization.<sup>44</sup> Although the eight different tales present the Arthurian world from eight distinct points of view, the text deals with one subject area, chronologically charting the legend from the birth to the death of Arthur. It seems to have been agreed at the beginning of this century that the entire *Morte Darthur* should be viewed as one entire work.

Before moving on to an examination of the current threads of commentary, I would summarize the three major areas of critical appraisal of the *Morte Darthur* and the *Sangreal* that have been discussed as the following themes. First, despite Caxton's claim that the work was a significant piece of literature for the English nation in 1485, its value as literature was not considered to be important until the Romantic period in the early nineteenth century, when Sir Walter Scott and Robert Southey re-evaluated the text's worth. Much of the early criticism revolved around how violence was presented in the text as a whole. Although Caxton saw the text as being a positive influence on others because it presented examples of both the proper and improper use of violence, Ascham rejected Caxton's view and saw the text as having an adverse effect on the young who enjoyed it because it not only displayed unreasonable violence but, because Lancelot was an adulterer. Second, when Southey's more scholarly assessment of the work identified the sources of the Grail, commentators began to examine how the supposed Cistercian background of the *Sangreal's* source, the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, influenced how the violence portrayed in the Tale should be viewed. It was not long before this violence was connected to the crusades and the justification of violence in crusading ideology. Third, having established that Malory's direct source for the *Sangreal* was influenced by Cistercian views of violence, the final critical debate rested upon whether the *Sangreal*

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<sup>44</sup> P.J.C. Field, 'Malory and His Audience', in *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. Alan Lupack, *Arthurian Studies* 51 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), 21-32, 27.

was an essential part of the overall structure of the *Morte Darthur*, or whether it was just one of the eight separate tales with little to contribute to any of the other tales. All these arguments continue to influence the recent critical debate surrounding the *Morte Darthur*, which will now be examined.

### **Recent Criticism of the *Sangreal***

Current commentary has taken on various themes as it narrows its focus to the *Sangreal* and attempts to make meaning of this particular book within the *Morte Darthur*. Sandra Ness Ihle examines the Grail itself to come to an understanding of the tale. She claims the Grail functioned as a ‘spiritual symbol’ since its inception by Chrétien de Troyes in the late twelfth century in his unfinished romance, *Le Conte du Graal*. She begins her commentary by supporting another of Vinaver’s arguments about the *Sangreal*, that Malory has removed the Grail legend from a monastic environment into a secular or chivalric environment. To show the distinction between the two versions of the Grail legend she examines the significance of the object in both texts.

In the *Queste* the meaning of the Grail lies behind its partial manifestations. The final secrets remain hidden to all but Galahad, who cannot express what he sees and is taken to heaven immediately. Malory narrows the descriptions of the Grail in order to make it into something we can know. He attempts to restrict the description of the Grail to what is appropriate for the Eucharistic vessel. The Grail in Malory has become symbolic of the mysteries of Christ as they are expressed in the Eucharist, and this association makes the Grail accessible to human sight and understanding. In the *Sangreal*, the Grail experience becomes available to any knight who is ‘clene of hys sinnes’ (869.3) making it available to all who live a good Christian life.<sup>45</sup> Ness Ihle’s assessment of the Grail as it is presented in the *Sangreal* suggests that it remains a guide to the Christian life for all, without acknowledging that it has any particular meaning for those engaged in a military life.

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<sup>45</sup> Sandra Ness Ihle, *Malory’s Grail Queste; Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 31-43.

Dhira B. Mahoney, however, argues that the *Sangreal* does embody a military ethos and uses this theme to create meaning. She says that Malory's decision to use the French *Queste*, rather than the more secular *Prose Tristan*, was not to secularize the Grail story but to reinterpret traditional chivalric values in the light of spiritual values demonstrating that the active life of the knight in fifteenth-century England had as much spiritual value as had the contemplative life of the monk in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Mahoney also tackles the claims made about the structure of the *Morte Darthur*, arguing that it was in fact one entire book rather than a selection of tales. She bases her reasoning on the characterization of Lancelot as the doctrinal pivot of the text. By linking his only partial success in the Grail quest to his love for Guinevere, his search for the spiritual values of the Grail quest continues until after Arthur's death and Guinever's rejection release him from his duties to the court as a knight.<sup>46</sup> Mahoney has, in effect, summed up much of the commentary based upon both the *Morte Darthur* and *The Tale of the Sangreal*. She identifies the *Sangreal* as a text based on military values governed by Christian ideals of the proper role of the knight in a Christian society, and she shows also that the *Sangreal* is an integral part of the entire text.

Beverly Kennedy agrees with Mahoney that the readers may interpret the *Sangreal* as an exhortation to the knights of the Round Table to live according to Christian principles. The knights do not abandon their worldly obligations to Arthur and Christendom to achieve this aim but use prayer and meditation to strengthen their spiritual lives. She argues that the appearance of the Grail at Camelot represents an instance of God's special grace to Arthurian civilization. This special grace challenged the knights to 'respond properly' because all knew that if they did not, the special grace would not come again.

Kennedy characterizes all the knights mentioned in the Grail quest as belonging to one of three knightly types: the heroic, the worshipful, and the true knight. The three knights who return to Camelot after the Grail quest, Gawain, Lancelot, and Bors, are

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<sup>46</sup> Dhira B. Mahoney, 'The Truest and Holiest Tale: Malory's Transformation of *La Queste Del Sainte Graal*', in *Studies in Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University Press, 1985), 109-128, 110-121.

representations respectively of each kind of knight and each becomes a major player in the civil strife that leads to the destruction of Arthurian civilization. What the Grail quest teaches them is that they must 'acknowledge their dependence on God's grace or else suffer the unhappynesse' which ... 'is the consequence of man's sinfulness'.<sup>47</sup> Kennedy has taken the idea that the meaning of the text can be read through the knights' reactions to the trials of the Grail quest a step further than Mahoney. She examines all the knights' exploits within the entire *Morte Darthur* and sees each has a role to play in the eventual destruction of the Arthurian civilization.

Felicity Riddy continues Mahoney's argument that Malory has transferred the monastic ideals of the *Queste*, established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, into the introspective and interior religious practices of the fifteenth-century gentry. In her argument that Malory is focusing on the 'next world' in *The Tale of the Sangreal*, the emphasis of the tale is no longer on fellowship, but on the study of the conscience of each knight.<sup>48</sup> Jill Mann discusses Malory's *Sangreal* as showing what happens when the worldly values of the Round Table are judged by religious standards. The effect is that Lancelot loses his pre-eminence because of his adultery and the entire civilization collapses.<sup>49</sup> What Riddy and Mann have identified is that the journeys of the knights in the Grail quest can be read as an examination of their motivations for violence and, once the sinfulness of these motivations is exposed, the collapse of Arthurian civilization becomes understandable.

Raluca L. Radulescu takes a more redemptive view and interprets the character of Lancelot in the Grail story as a rehabilitation of worldly chivalry and a celebration of the utmost glory a sinful knight may gain. She demonstrates how integral the *Sangreal* is to

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<sup>47</sup> Beverly Kennedy, 'Knighthood in the *Morte Darthur*', *Arthurian Studies* 11 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), 251-274.

<sup>48</sup> Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Douglas Gray, John Norton-Smith, Nicholas Mann, *Medieval and Renaissance Authors* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 113-138. This thesis does not discuss the fifteenth-century context as other commentators dealt with many of these issues. Its focus is a reading of Malory's *Sangreal* to demonstrate how it has been influenced by crusading ideology as it was influenced by the church.

<sup>49</sup> Jill Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, *Arthurian Studies* 37 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), 203-220, 207-210.

the rest of the *Morte Darthur* by arguing that Lancelot's sin is that he performs his feats of arms for the queen rather than God and believes the source of his valour is himself rather than God. He must learn that God is the true source of his valour and return to the principles of the chivalric oath. He must be obedient to God. Lancelot does demonstrate that he has learned the lessons of the Grail. *The Tale of Sir Urry* in Book Seven of the *Morte Darthur* is the story of a better Lancelot, who performs a miracle and stands out. He shows that he does understand the grace he has been given and that he can forsake his former sin by asking for God's help.<sup>50</sup> Riddy, Mann, and Radulescu have read Malory's *Sangreal* through Lancelot and how he reflects the major themes of the entire *Morte Darthur*. Therefore, an examination of Bors, Perceval, Galahad and Lancelot's Grail journey can only increase the understanding of the *Sangreal's* role in the entire *Morte Darthur*. My thesis proceeds on this premise.

Stephen C.B. Atkinson confirms the *Sangreal's* relationship to the rest of the *Morte Darthur* in terms of Lancelot's role. He argues that the *Sangreal* uses the content of the French *Queste*, thereby acknowledging that the spiritual concerns of the texts are derived from the same source. However, he argues that it is the context of the *Sangreal* that sets it apart from the *Queste*, because the *Sangreal* cannot be read as a discrete part of the *Morte Darthur*. Atkinson reads Lancelot's characterization in the entire *Morte Darthur* based upon his presentation in the *Sangreal*, which, as Atkinson argues, has no place for public recognition and which exposes all secrets. What he sets out to show is that, despite his obvious spiritual disabilities, Lancelot still doggedly continues in his own quest for the Grail. The evidence Atkinson uses to make his claims is based upon Lancelot's reactions to violent situations, such as when Lancelot chooses to support the black knights at a tournament during his journey through the Grail quest.<sup>51</sup> Atkinson's article has, therefore, used the *Sangreal* to interpret the *Morte Darthur* by acknowledging that it plays an

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<sup>50</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, 'Now I Take Upon Me the Adventures to Seke of Holy Things: Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, *Arthurian Studies* 57 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), 285-295, 287-295.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen C.B. Atkinson, 'Malory's Lancelot and the Quest of the Grail', in *Studies in Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1985), 129-152, 129-138.

overall part in the meaning of the entire text, that it is concerned with how violence is portrayed through a chivalry based on spiritual ideals and it uses the characterization of one of its knights to make its point.

Modern commentators all agree that the *Sangreal* represents the spirituality of the *Morte Darthur*, and most link this with the function of violence. With the exception of Sandra Ness Ihle and Beverly Kennedy, all the commentators examine Lancelot's characterization in the Grail journey to explain this. But this view ignores how the other prominent knights in the *Sangreal* also contribute to our understanding of the place of spiritual values in Arthurian civilization and how each contributes to the overall question of how violence should be justified. How this problem is addressed will be explained in the final part of this introduction.

### **Structure of This Thesis**

In my thesis I propose that in the *Morte Darthur* violence can be justified only when it is based upon the spiritual ideals articulated in the *Sangreal*. I argue that the model of violence explained in the *Sangreal* shows how the knights of the Round Table should have used violence in their activities and that the Grail quest is effectively a last-ditch effort to reform the activities of the knights of the Round Table, by teaching them the correct use of violence. Because only a few knights are successful in the quest and only one Grail knight returns to Camelot, the lessons of the Grail are not learned and the Arthurian kingdom destroys itself under the weight of the unjustified use of violence. In line with this argument, I argue against Vinaver's view that Malory saw the Grail quest as an Arthurian adventure that offered the knights of the Round Table an opportunity to achieve greater glory.<sup>52</sup> The *Sangreal* is integral to the overall meaning of the entire *Morte Darthur*, its ideological heart, because it presents a version of chivalry that could have saved Arthurian civilization if it had been adhered to in the events of the final two books.

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<sup>52</sup> Vinaver as quoted in Malory, *Works*, 1535.

Although recent commentators have focused on Lancelot's Grail journey, I expand this approach and examine the Grail journey of the three successful Grail knights, Galahad, Bors and Perceval, as well as Lancelot, to demonstrate how each represents a different kind of spiritual expression within the world. These individual examinations show that each spiritual expression has important implications for how the knights of the Round Table justify the use of violence. I begin in Chapter One by examining the history of the church's attitude to violence and the development of a crusading ideology demanding that violence could be justified only when it was used to further Christian objectives. I examine how crusading ideology had a direct impact on the earliest known Grail literature, Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Conte du Graal* or *Perceval* and, by looking at how the story of Perceval was changed in the text attributed to Robert de Boron, and how Grail literature became christianized. Both these texts were the basis of Malory's direct source the *Queste del Sainte Graal*.

In Chapter Two, I begin a series of examinations of individual knightly journeys through the Grail quest. The spiritual biography focuses on each knight's journey as he struggles to return to spiritual ideals and a primary allegiance to God. The first spiritual biography, in Chapter Two, is of Perceval, and of how his Grail journey prepares him for a life lived in monastic orders. Chapter Three concerns Bors, and examines the Grail journey of a knight firmly committed to living his spiritual ideals within the world. Chapter Four concerns Galahad, an exemplar of the spiritual ideals of the Grail, and demonstrates why Arthurian chivalry is so spiritually lacking. These chapters have presented views of the various paths taken by successful Grail knights, but the next two chapters will examine why others were not successful. Lancelot's journey in Chapter Five demonstrates that Lancelot's choices in situations that require him to make a decision about the use of violence prohibit him from becoming a member of the exclusive Grail fellowship. Although Lancelot was not invited to become a Grail knight, his spiritual journey extends far beyond what is presented in the *Sangreal*. To have a full understanding of his spiritual biography, his complete portrayal throughout the *Morte Darthur* must be taken into account. Chapter Six examines the kingship of Arthur and his estrangement from spiritual ideals at the beginning of his reign. This thesis will show that, from the very beginning,

Arthurian civilization was doomed to fail because the spiritual ideals represented by the Grail were not incorporated into the chivalry practised at the Arthurian court. What will be established will be the overall importance of the *Sangreal* in any assessment of the *Morte Darthur*. Without an understanding of how integral this particular book is to the overall text, the significance of the spiritual factor in the Arthurian civilization cannot be appreciated.

## Chapter One

### The Context of Malory's *Sangreal*

Malory's compilation of Arthurian stories, called the *Morte Darthur* by Thomas Caxton in 1485 and the *Works of Sir Thomas Malory* by Eugène Vinaver in 1947, brings disparate episodes together to set out the overall story of Arthurian civilization. This story begins with Arthur's conception in the castle at Tintagel and ends after his death as the last of the surviving knights of the Round Table die on Good Friday, fighting the infidel in the Holy Land. Within this vast breadth of what others have called the *Arthuriad*,<sup>53</sup> signifying the epic quality and unity of this romance, Malory has created a civilization that at its beginning is steeped in otherworldly enchantment, and at its end is referenced to the Christian ideology of Just and Righteous War. If, as Eugène Vinaver, the first modern editor of the Malory manuscript, believes, this is essentially a compilation of eight separate tales, this change in ideological and spiritual focus is understandable.<sup>54</sup> Other commentators, however, have argued that this is a single book, and if this is the position taken by any individual critic, an evaluation of such a wide-ranging change of focus requires much greater critical assessment.

There is a significant shift from violence in a world of enchantment, which favours a system of violence based on personal gain, to violence in a world of Christian ethics, which favours a system of violence employed to protect the Christian community, and this shift occurs in Malory's retelling of the Grail legend, *The Tale of the Sangreal*. I would argue that the driving ideological focus of the *Sangreal* is a critical meditation on the correct use of violence in a society and I am using this broad range of reference to one particular Christian understanding of justified violence to demonstrate how the *Sangreal* introduces a new spiritual order of chivalry into the *Morte Darthur*. The Tale explores how violence is to be used properly by documenting the individual journeys of principal

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<sup>53</sup> This title was used by Stephen Knight in his discussion of the unity of Malory's work in *The Structure of Sir Thomas Malory's Arthuriad*. He argues that the earlier books of the *Morte Darthur* are a collection of separate tales but that the last three books, including the *Sangreal*, are a cohesive narrative because within these last three books, there are identifiable causes and effects that build upon each other until the final destruction of the Arthurian civilization.

<sup>54</sup> Vinaver, 'Preface to the First Edition (1947)', as quoted in Malory, *Works*, ix.

knights of the Round Table. Each journey follows the spiritual progress of the knight as he confronts situations that test his full acceptance of Christian duty by presenting the possibility of accepting or rejecting an act of violence. The choices each knight makes determine whether or not he is worthy to join the exclusive fellowship of the Grail and be admitted to the Grail ceremony in which the Grail's truth is revealed. If the knight is invited to join the Grail fellowship, he has proven that the code of chivalry that he follows is based on spiritual ideals governing the proper use of violence in society. In fact, the knight is a knight of Christ.

This thesis seeks to understand how this significant shift in the use of violence occurs in the *Sangreal*. To achieve this aim, the thesis looks into the individual journeys of the knights on the Grail quest to uncover their spiritual biography, or to witness how they come to understand what is meant by the term, 'a knight of Christ.' It will track the biographies of four key knights, Perceval, Bors, Galahad, and Lancelot, together with that of the king, Arthur, to demonstrate how the *Sangreal* challenges each to leave behind a worldly code of chivalry for a spiritual code of chivalry. The Grail quest demands that the knights give up the rewards of honour and luxury in Arthur's court and pursue a spiritual life where their ultimate reward is salvation after death.<sup>55</sup> Those knights who do become members of the Grail fellowship have shown that they are prepared to cut any tie to the court of Arthur in order to do God's will whenever they are faced with a situation that could result in violence. If there is a possibility of violence, their first consideration is how an act of violence will affect a community, and their own needs and desires are set aside to protect those who rely on their knightly skills for defense. It is the knight's inner intention that determines whether or not he will be invited to become a member of the Grail fellowship.

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Lynch, "“Thou Woll Never Have Done”": Ideology, Context and Excess in Malory's War', in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks Jr, *Arthurian Studies* 42 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 24-41, 28. Lynch argues that the *Sangreal* is the one book of the *Morte Darthur* that privileges a moral analysis of the causes of violence, placing this analysis in a Christian context, because the outcome of the various adventures found in the *Sangreal* are dependent upon the state of the individual knight's soul.

This dramatic shift in the focus of chivalry in the *Morte Darthur* mirrors the development of how violence might be justified across the medieval period. It is even more remarkable in view of the acknowledged fact that Malory's direct source of the *Sangreal*, the French *Queste Del Sainte Graal*,<sup>56</sup> was written at the end of the period when ideas about the proper use of violence were being formulated in the light of the crusading movement.<sup>57</sup> A large contribution to this debate was made by the most famous member of the Cistercian order, Bernard of Clairvaux, whose treatise *In Praise of the New Knighthood* clearly distinguishes between knights who act upon their own needs and desires and knights who act for Christ and the good of the community. Thus Malory's *Sangreal* is informed by the historical debate on how violence is presented in the *Queste*. How these conclusions were reached can be determined only through an examination of the historical context surrounding the justification of violence.

### **The Justification of Violence in a Christian Society**

What singled out an individual knight as a knight of Christ in a Christian society is best explored by examining how violence was reconciled with Christianity in the medieval period. The correct use of violence was a subject that had long concerned many thinkers in the Christian era, arguably from the apostle Paul, through Augustine of Hippo, to Bernard of Clairvaux. The issue of the correct use of violence in society was confused by the pacifism preached by Christ in the gospels. For example, in Matthew 5.38-9, Christ preaches in the Sermon on the Mount that those who follow him should turn the other cheek in response to a violent act against them:

You have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strikes thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the

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<sup>56</sup> Vinaver writes that Malory's *Sangreal* is the least original of all the books in the *Morte Darthur*. He describes it as a translation of the *Queste Del Sainte Graal*, although he admits that there are many omissions and minor alterations. These omissions and alternations have been the subject of much scholarly interest since Vinaver's comments were written in 1947. See Malory, *Works*, 1534.

<sup>57</sup> David Wallace, 'Imperium, Commerce, and National Crusade: The Romance of Malory's *Morte*', in *New Medieval Literatures* 8, ed. Rita Copeland, David Lawton, and Wendy Scase (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 45-65, 61. Wallace describes Malory's *Sangreal* as being crusade-like without requiring the Grail knights to leave English territory.

other.<sup>58</sup>

Paul in the apostolic period had written in Romans 12.19 that all vengeance lay in the hands of God and in verse 21 had advised the followers of Christ:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.<sup>59</sup>

However, a Christian society still had to maintain law and order as well as protect itself from those who would destroy its fabric from both inside and outside. To justify violence in a Christian society, the violence had to be described as an act of good overcoming an act of evil. It was this issue that Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, addressed in the fifth century.

Augustine's ideas about violence came from both the Christian tradition shaped by Christ's Sermon on the Mount and the Natural Law tradition inherited from Stoic Philosophy and Roman Law. Natural Law accepted that violence was necessary to enforce law and order, and accordingly Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, writing in the fourth century, praised the people both for protecting their country in a time of war, as well as defending the weak and protecting their friends from robbers in a time of peace.<sup>60</sup> Augustine, working within both the Christian and Roman legal traditions, built upon Ambrose's statement regarding the necessity of violence to protect society. On one hand he concluded that sin caused violence, but on the other hand he countered this with the idea that violence was also a remedy for sin. What ensured that the violence was conducted as a remedy for sin was that it was performed by divine command:

The act, the agent, and the authority for the action are all of great importance in the order of nature. For Abraham to sacrifice his son of his own accord is shocking madness. His doing so at the command of God proves him faithful and submissive.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (Dublin: Gill, 1846). All further references will be to this version of the Bible. In the Latin, 'audistis quia dictum est oculus pro oculo et dentum pro dente ego autem dico vobis non resistere malo sed si quis te percusserit in dextera maxilla tua praebe illi et alteram'. Robert Weber, ed., *Biblica Sacra Iuxta Vulgata Versionem* (Stuttgart: Bibelgesellschaft, 2005). All further Latin quotations from the Vulgate will be from this version of the text and found in the footnotes.

<sup>59</sup> In the Latin, 'noli vinci a malo sed vinci in bono malo'.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen C Neff, *War and the Law of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45-46.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 'Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon', in *Writings in Connection with the Manichaeon Controversy*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene

From this standpoint, Augustine argued that it was not war that was intrinsically evil. What made war evil was that it could be accompanied by sins committed by those who conducted the violence. These particular sins could include a love of violence and cruelty or greed and the lust for power. To explain the attributes of a warrior who conducted violence correctly, he stipulated that the warrior should act under God's command. Furthermore, the warrior's intention in conducting this violence was to be obedient to the divine will without any unnecessary ferocity. Augustine turned to the example of Moses to demonstrate his point of view:

[The] account of the wars of Moses will not excite surprise or abhorrence, for in wars carried on by divine command, he showed not ferocity but obedience; and God, in giving the command, acted not in cruelty, but in righteous retribution giving to all what they deserved, and warning those who needed warning.<sup>62</sup>

Augustine's thinking was also inspired by other Old Testament examples of violence, such as Judges 5, where violence is conducted under the instruction of the divine as a punishment for sins and crimes.<sup>63</sup> Verses 31 and 32 articulate this effectively:

'So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!

But let them that love thee shine, as the sun shineth in his rising.'

And the land rested for forty years.<sup>64</sup>

This particular passage shows that justifiable violence must have the purpose of bringing peace by removing what is essentially designated as evil. According to Augustine, the

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Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1887), book 33 (73), 300. In the Latin, 'tantum interest in ordine naturali, quid a quo agatur, et sub quo quisque agat. Abraham si filium sponte immolaret, quid, nisi horribilis et insanus? Deo autem jubente, quid, nisi fidelis et devotus apparuit'. See Augustine of Hippo, 'Episcopi Contra Faustum Manichaeum Libri triginta tres', col. 0446 *Jacques-Paul Migne's Patrologiae cursus completus* 42 (Paris: Garnier, 1844-1893). All other references in Latin are to this version of the text and quoted in the footnotes.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 'Reply to Faustus the Manichaeus', Book 33 (74), 300. In the Latin, 'nec bella per Moysen gesta miretur aut horreat, quia et in illis divina secutus imperia, non saeviens, sed obediens fuit: nec Deus, cum jubebat ista, saeviebat: sed digna dignis retribuebat, dignosque terreat'. Augustine of Hippo, 'Episcopi Contra Faustum Manichaeum Libri triginta tres', col. 0447.

<sup>63</sup> M.H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 9.

<sup>64</sup> In the Latin, 'sic pereant omnes inimici tui Domine qui autem diligent te sicut sol in ortu suo splendet ita rutilant quievitque terra per quadragintanos'.

goal of every war should be peace, thereby making violence an instrument of peace.<sup>65</sup>

By concluding that war was not in itself evil if conducted to secure peace by removing evil, Augustine could place the responsibility for the correct use of violence on the warrior who would conduct the violent action. He argued that the role of the warrior was to be an instrument of peace in society and he used the notion of charity, as in the sense of *caritas*, to explain that the punishment of evildoers prevented them from committing a future wrong. Augustine maintained that the concept of turning the other cheek referred to the inward disposition of the heart when making the choice to commit an act of violence, rather than to the outward deed. If violence was to be seen as a fit method of punishment of evildoers, it must be administered without any recourse to revenge and without taking pleasure in the act of violence. Consequently Augustine reconciled divinely justified violence in the Old Testament with the pacific notions of charity in the New Testament.<sup>66</sup> He justified violence by demonstrating how it could be used to prevent men from turning to evil in the future. Augustine's assessment of this issue provided the background to a system of thought that defined the correct use of violence within any given society while maintaining the basic tenets of Christian thought. Over time, doctrines were developed that reconciled Christianity's pacifist inheritance with the responsibilities of administering and protecting individual communities.<sup>67</sup> Augustine argued that violence was necessary to society because it removed evil from that society.

In the Middle Ages war was an endemic condition of society and in legal terms the justice of war could legitimize acts that would be considered crimes in times of peace, such as taking a man captive or destroying the property of another. If these acts were committed where there was no justification for the use of violence to resolve a dispute, these acts were outside the law. A state of war required justification in order to legitimize

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<sup>65</sup> Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> David S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300-1215* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2003), 2.

its acts of violence.<sup>68</sup> Augustine's views were incorporated into Gratian's *Decretium* written around 1140, which set out a *de facto* official canon law code for the medieval Church. Thomas Aquinas endorsed this code in the thirteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Following Augustine, Gratian argues that war is not intrinsically sinful. Violence could even be pleasing in the eyes of God whenever it was an instrument of peace. His view demanded that warriors have the right motives when using violence to right a wrong or address an injury. To ensure that the violence was being used for the correct motives, Gratian insisted that the correct authority sanction it. Although God was the ultimate authority, Gratian argued that the church could sanction warfare on God's behalf.<sup>70</sup> What emerged through the writings of both Augustine and Gratian was that the outcome of any violent action was peace and that a legitimate authority had sanctioned the action because another party had caused an injury to a right, a person, or a possession. It was the warrior's responsibility to ensure that these conditions were met if he faced a situation that could end in violence.

Christian ideals of the justification of violence were not just debated in clerical circles; they were the background to how the crusades were justified. When Urban II called for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, an emerging description of the right attributes of the knight is found in the reports of Urban's speech.<sup>71</sup> In the report by Fulcher's of Chartres, knights are urged to give up unjust private wars against other Christians and to go to reclaim Jerusalem from infidels and return it to Christian control. In Fulcher's version, the Crusade's purpose is not just to reclaim Jerusalem; it is also a means to control knightly violence in Europe. Urban, in Fulcher's version, frames this

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<sup>68</sup> Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages*, 65.

<sup>69</sup> Neff, *War and the Law of Nations*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 66-67.

<sup>71</sup> There are different accounts of Urban's sermon at the Council of Clermont by Fulcher of Chartres, Robert the Monk, Baldric of Dol and Guibert of Nogent. Although Fulcher, Robert and Baldric are believed to have been present at the council, it is impossible to verify if any of their accounts are correct. What each account shows is how the First Crusade is justified because its purpose is to return Christian property into Christian hands. Following the council four letters of Urban II have been used by historians to attempt to understand how Urban envisaged the crusade. See Robert Somerville, *Papacy, Councils and Canon Law in the 11th -12th Centuries, Collected Studies Series*, CS312 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990).

aim of the First Crusade as a process of divine correction:<sup>72</sup>

Since, Oh sons of God, you have promised Him to keep peace among yourselves and to faithfully sustain the rights of Holy Church more sincerely than before, there still remains for you, newly aroused by God's correction, an urgent task which belongs to both you and God, in which you can show the strength of your good will. For you must hasten to carry aid to your brethren dwelling in the East, who need your help for which they have entreated.<sup>73</sup>

The many instances of unjustified violence in Europe are to be supplanted by the justified and church-sanctioned violence in the Holy Land. Baldric of Dol clearly lists the unjustified violent activities that will be eradicated in Europe if knights fight in the First Crusade. The unjustified acts of violence include the oppression of children, the plundering of widows, homicide and sacrilege, and the robbery of other's rights. Knights who indulge in such destructive activities are urged to give up the shedding of Christian blood and to go to the East to fight the infidel. Baldric calls the crusade an act of charity, or *caritas*, because the knights will no longer be raising their hands against their Christian brothers but will be fighting a righteous war against the Saracens.<sup>74</sup> According to Robert the Monk the reward for their service will be the remission of all sins and they can be sure of attaining the glory of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>75</sup> As Malcolm Barber argues, the layman believed that the indulgence granted to crusaders was a passport to heaven if he was killed in battle or by the hardships of the journey.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem*, trans. Frances Rita Ryan (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 63.

<sup>73</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem*, 65-66.

<sup>74</sup> Baldric of Dol as quoted in August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958), 35.

<sup>75</sup> Robert the Monk, *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade*, trans. Carol Sweetenham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 81.

<sup>76</sup> Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42. James Muldoon argues that during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. The idea of a pilgrimage or a journey to a Holy site to expiate sins acquired a new aspect when crusaders travelled to the Holy Land and freed Jerusalem. The crusaders earned a plenary indulgence, and would be forgiven for all the temporal punishment they earned by their sins. The crusaders who travelled with right intentions were granted salvation. See James Muldoon, 'Crusading and Canon Law', in *The Crusades*, ed. Helen Nicholson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 37-57, 45-46.

Throughout these accounts of Urban's speech a clear distinction arises between the sinful activities of the knights who fight private wars at home and the glorious deeds of knights who go to the Holy Land and fight for Christ. In Urban's letters written in the year following the Council of Clermont, he addresses the issue of right intention when an act of violence is considered. Knights who join the crusade because of their devotion, and without the hope of worldly gain, will be freed from all penance relating to sins for which honest and complete confession has been made.<sup>77</sup> What emerges from the reports of the Council of Clermont and from Urban's letters is that the behaviour and activity of knights are to be based on Christian ideals of the proper use of violence.

This theme is explored further in the clerical writing of the twelfth century. Bernard of Clairvaux made the most explicit statement on the distinction between the two models of knightly activity. Bernard exercised an extraordinary influence on spiritual and temporal matters during his lifetime and wrote extensively in support of the military order of the Templars. This was an order of knights who abandoned any possibility of worldly reward and focused their attention to heavenly rewards, raising knighthood to the status of a spiritual vocation. This is the major theme of Bernard's treatise *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, written while he was the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux in 1135. His treatise was addressed to Hugh of Payens, who was perhaps the first Grand Master of the Order of the Templars, and its aim was to combine the spirit of monastic life with knighthood and provide protection for pilgrims in the Holy Land.

In his treatise, Bernard depicts two models of knighthood and identifies the motivation to knightly acts of violence as the major indicator of how a knight can be classified within this system. The first model of knighthood is described as worldly. Such a knight is driven by his own selfish desires and does not consider the consequences of his actions upon the community. He is the knight who, in the reports of Urban's speech at the Council of Clermont, is so vividly described by his crimes against others. Bernard takes this a step further and analyzes the causes of the violent act. This knight is motivated to commit violence because of 'unreasonable flashes of anger, the thirst for empty glory or

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Somerville, *Papacy, Councils and Canon Law in the 11th -12th Centuries*, 328-329.

the hankering after some earthly possession'.<sup>78</sup> The physical appearance of this knight shows his attachment to the physical and material rewards he may gather through his knightly activities:

You cover your horses with silk, and plume your armour with I know not what sort of rags; you paint your shields and your saddles; you adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones; and then in all this glory you rush to your ruin with fearful wrath and fearless folly (133).<sup>79</sup>

A knight's ostentatious clothing, horse and armour demonstrate that he is interested only in his own well-being and not in the well-being of his community. This attitude has dire consequences for the knight if he becomes involved in a violent situation, because in Bernard's view, he should be more concerned about the state of his soul than the state of his body, because, if he has not sinned, his soul will not die with the body (131). A spiritual victory for a knight, or the hope of salvation, depends on the disposition of his heart rather than on the fortunes of war. A knight killed while seeking to kill another is considered a murderer, as is one who successfully overcomes, but accidentally kills a man. Because the sins of wrath and pride have overtaken him, this knight will not achieve salvation.

The second model of knighthood described by Bernard, the New Knighthood, is a new order, consisting of knights who have given their entire will to God. The knights trust that God will bring them victory or defeat depending upon his providential plan. Although they are not monks, these knights are identified by the discipline and obedience regulating their whole life. Bernard demonstrates this by describing their daily activities in this way: the knights 'will come and go at the bidding of their superior',<sup>80</sup> 'they wear

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<sup>78</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 116. All further references in English will be to this edition of the text and cited in the body of the text. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Œuvres Complètes*, trans. Pierre-Yves Emery, 31 (Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 1990), 58. In the Latin, 'irrationabilis iracundiae motus, aut inanis gloriae appetites, aut terrenae qualiscumque possessionis cupiditas'. All further references in Latin will be to this edition of the text and will be cited in the footnotes to page number.

<sup>79</sup> In the Latin, 'operitis equos sericis, et pendulos nescio quos panniculus loricis superinduitis; depingitis hastas, clypeos et sellas; frena et calcaria auro et argento gemmisque circumornatis, et cum tanta pompa pudendo furore et impudenti stupora ad mortem properatis (56)'.

<sup>80</sup> In the Latin, 'itur et reditur ad nutum eius qui praeest (66)'.

what he gives them<sup>81</sup> ... shun every excess in clothing and food',<sup>82</sup> and they content 'themselves with what is necessary'.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the knights 'live as brothers in joyful and sober company, without wives or children'<sup>84</sup> and 'so that their evangelical perfection will lack nothing, they will dwell united in one family with no personal property whatever, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (138-139).<sup>85</sup> What Bernard has described in these daily activities is a knight living under the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>86</sup> The result of this mode of living was to have all members of the order follow a shared vision, described as the will of God. This is in direct opposition to the worldly knights who followed their own worldly needs and desires to destructive ends. Bernard expresses the shared vision of the New Knighthood thus:

You may say that the whole multitude has but one heart and one soul to the point that nobody follows his own will, but seeks to follow the commander (139).<sup>87</sup>

Although Bernard writes his treatise in an open letter addressed to the Grand Master of the Templars, a group that banded together about 1120 with the purpose of providing military protection for pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem from the port of Jaffa,<sup>88</sup> Bernard envisages the New Knighthood as a solution to the problems of public order in Europe. It encourages knights to leave Europe and travel to Jerusalem on the promise of immediate salvation after death. Bernard sees this as 'a twofold joy' because 'their countrymen are as glad to get rid of them as their new comrades are to receive them (143)'.<sup>89</sup> So

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<sup>81</sup> In the Latin, 'induitur quod ille donaverit (66)'.

<sup>82</sup> In the Latin, 'in victu et in vestitu cavetur omne superfluum (68)'.

<sup>83</sup> In the Latin, 'soli necessitati consulitur (68)'.

<sup>84</sup> In the Latin, 'vivitur in communi, plane iucunda et sobria conversatione, absque uxoribus, absque liberis (68)'.

<sup>85</sup> In the Latin, 'et ne quid desit ex evangelica perfectione, absque omni proprio habitant unius moris in domo una, solliciti servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis (67-68)'.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades: 1095-1588* (Chicago, IL and London: Chicago University Press, 1988), 30.

<sup>87</sup> In the Latin, 'dicas universae multitudinis esse cor unum et animam unam: ita quisque non omnino propriam sequi voluntatem, sed magis obsequi satagit imperanti (68)'.

<sup>88</sup> Tyerman, *England and the Crusades: 1095-1588*, 30.

<sup>89</sup> In the Latin, 'sicut duplex quoddam constat provenire bonum, ita duplicatur et gaudium, quandoquidem tam suos de suo discessu laetificant, quam illos de advente quibus subvenire festinant (76)'.

Bernard's plan for his New Knighthood has the added benefit of reforming those knights who were terrorizing Europe by their impious deeds into knights who would engage in the virtuous work of protecting pilgrims in the Holy Land as they revelled in their new association with Christ. The Templars would dedicate their lives to giving a true peace offering to God in the form of brotherly love, devoted obedience and voluntary poverty.<sup>90</sup> If a knight died in battle fighting for the church and had a pure heart, he would immediately inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>91</sup> Although Bernard's treatise is concerned specifically with supporting the Templars, it does set up the distinction between knights whose activities have been essentially private and for their own personal gain and knights whose activities are now part of the public realm and are directed by a willingness to follow Christian ideals.

Bernard was writing in a time when the questions of public order and violence were being discussed throughout Latin Christendom. The distinction Bernard identified between worldly knighthood and another sort of knighthood, taking inspiration from monastic ideals, was evident among other commentators concerned about knightly activities current in Europe. The Anglo-Norman monk Orderic Vitalis, in his *Ecclesiastical History* written between 1123 and 1137, argued for firm and authoritative action against the constant violence, disorder, and warfare he saw around him. It was the violence amongst Christians that troubled him, and he could show approval for this type of violence only if it led to a more peaceful society. He blamed the local feuding lords who had apparently escaped royal restraint over this state of affairs and marvelled at how God would continue to direct the church from such tumult of war and the clash of arms. Suger, Abbot of Saint-Denis from 1138 to 1145, further developed Orderic's idea that local lords were in fact to blame for this sense of lawlessness in Europe. Tyrants, as Suger called the local lords who terrorized their local community, provoked wars, took pleasure in endless pillage, troubling the poor and destroying churches, and became bolder and acted in the manner of evil spirits if not restrained. He called on the king to

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<sup>90</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 143.

<sup>91</sup> Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1972), 26.

restrain the impudence of these tyrants.<sup>92</sup>

The church, however, responded in another way to the threat to its own property and to the poor by civil disorder. Two clerical movements known as the Peace of God and the Truce of God called for a reform of knightly activities throughout the eleventh century, a reform whereby knights who took up weapons against the church were vilified and excommunicated, but knights who ensured the safety of the church were praised and blessed.<sup>93</sup> New ways of thinking were instituted about the role of the knight in society. Clerics called councils in many provinces of France, such as Aquitaine, Arles, Lyons and Burgundy, in the presence of the people in order to denounce violence against the church, its 'sacred things' and the poor.<sup>94</sup> The councils did not deny that knights had a right to fight; what was condemned at these councils was the unjust pillage of the churches and the poor. In the earliest stages of the Peace of God the councils wanted to contain violence to approved places and social categories, but, as the movement grew, so did its reforming spirit. The councils began to advocate a much more penitential character whereby their aim became to appease the wrath of God, to combat disaster, and to fend off famine and pestilence. The Peace of God had become a direct pact with God, in the hope of appeasing him with promises of voluntary abstinence, of being purified of sin, and of following the monastic example. The pact demanded that the sinner put down his weapons as he renounced his worldly goods, made a vow of chastity and commenced a pilgrimage of redemption.

For those whose calling was to bear weapons, the knights, the Peace of God demanded that they associate themselves with the universal task of renunciation. They were required to do more than just respect the laws by not attacking churches, the clerics, and the poor during military operations or while performing their seigniorial duties; they were required to deprive themselves of the pleasure of fighting and pillaging in the same way a cleric deprived himself of eating foods that gave too much pleasure. The knights were also

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<sup>92</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 11-17.

<sup>93</sup> John Flori, 'Ideology and Motivations in the First Crusade', in *The Crusades*, ed. Helen Nicholson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 15-36, 16.

<sup>94</sup> George Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (London: Arnold, 1977), 123-125.

expected to do this in the spirit of poverty.<sup>95</sup> In this understanding of the role of the knight, war became a sin or a guilty pleasure and knights were asked to renounce it during times like Lent, the Sabbath, or holy days. What this truce came to represent was the knight's willingness to show his love of Christ by not drawing his sword during these designated times.

An example of how this abstinence from violence on holy days worked is found in a contemporary biography of Bernard of Clairvaux, written by his friend and associate, William of St Thierry. A group of knights called to see Bernard at Clairvaux on their way to a tournament. Bernard asked them to refrain from fighting for the few days left before the beginning of Lent but the knights refused. Bernard answered their refusal with the exhortation that God would grant him the truce that they denied. Bernard called for beer and blessed it by proposing a toast to their souls. When the knights left the monastery, many found that they were compelled to return because their hearts were burning within them and they offered themselves for the knighthood of the Spirit.<sup>96</sup> In short, Bernard convinced these knights that their worldly love of violence would ultimately lead to damnation. Although these particular knights chose to protect their souls by putting down their swords and joining a monastery, other knights chose a different path. Knightly confraternities were becoming more common during the eleventh century. These were groups of knights who banded together and pooled their assets in order that all members could be supplied with military equipment. The purpose of these fraternities was again a fusion of military and religious ideals because they would commit themselves to protecting churches and monasteries against bandits.<sup>97</sup> In 1095 the Peace of God extended itself to a much greater and more universal focus when Urban II announced the First Crusade.

By the eve of the twelfth century the approved role of the knight in society was twofold. The knight's first duty was to protect the church and the poor, and second duty was to

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<sup>95</sup> Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 125-130.

<sup>96</sup> William of St Thierry, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Early Biographies, Centennial Edition 1090-1990*, trans. Martinus Cawley (Lafayette, OR: Guadalupe Translations, 1989), 67-70.

<sup>97</sup> Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar: A New History* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001), 22.

fight the enemies of Christ.<sup>98</sup> A Christian ideal of how violence could be justified had created a new spiritual conception of the role of the knight in society. Violence, as Augustine stated, was justified when its intention was to restore peace and Christian ideals. Later movements would institute a penitential aspect to the knightly code. It was the knight's inner motivation that determined whether or not his violence conformed to Christian ideals. If a knight committed an act of violence in order to remove those who pulled a community away from Christian ideals, the act would be perceived as the will of God. This was especially true if the act of violence was successful as, for example, the taking of Jerusalem by the First Crusaders. If, however, a knight committed an act of violence for his own benefit, whether to increase his own personal wealth through the taking of plunder, to increase his prestige at the court of his own sovereign, or for his own personal pleasure, he was seen as being the worldly knight described by Bernard in *In Praise of the New Knighthood*. Therefore knighthood could be divided into two separate positions: those knights who used violence to satisfy their own needs and desires, and knights who used violence because they were inspired by spiritual ideals.

### **Christian Ideals of the Correct Use of Violence and the Grail**

Although thinking around the correct use of violence in society would continue to develop in Canon Law, Christian ideals of justified violence also appeared in literature. They are presented through the characters and activities of the knight protagonists. It has been also argued that the historical events occurring in the Holy Land had a profound effect upon how violence was portrayed. Stephen Knight argues that the Grail entered the stories about King Arthur when Jerusalem was lost to the Islamic forces of Saladin in 1187 at the Battle of Hattin.<sup>99</sup> Before the battle, the inclusion of Jerusalem in Western Christendom represented an opportunity to reform the worldly knights of Europe by sending them to do the work of God in the Holy Land. Jerusalem was portrayed as the centre of the crusading ideal and the First Crusaders who captured the city in 1099 were increasingly idealized as models of spiritual and chivalric excellence. Once the city was

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<sup>98</sup> Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 131-135.

<sup>99</sup> Knight, 'From Jerusalem to Camelot: King Arthur and the Crusades', 223.

lost, and the Grail stories started to emerge in Northern France, the spiritually motivated knight portrayed in the romances could be read as an example to be followed. I shall argue also that, in Grail literature, those knights who follow the Christian ideals of how violence should be justified are the knights who succeed in the Grail quest. They provide an example for other knights to follow.

Eugène Vinaver says that, by the time Malory was writing his version of the Grail legend, he was no longer trying to describe the differences between the two knighthoods. He argues that what Malory was doing in the *Sangreal* was offering the knights of the Round Table another opportunity to win glory in this world.<sup>100</sup> Jill Mann agrees that the purpose of the Grail quest is a path to greater glory by giving the knights a vision of their spiritual worth. The Grail, signifying the vessel of the Eucharist containing the blood and body of Christ, comes to represent the essential elements of the knights' spiritual worth. Just as Christ sacrificed his blood and body on the cross for the redemption of human kind, knights also hazard their bodies in combat and risk shredding their own blood.<sup>101</sup> These readings of the *Sangreal* equate the Grail experience with the every day experience of all knights; it is no longer the exclusive experience of an exalted few.

I challenge these arguments by acknowledging that the knights who return to Camelot and the court of Arthur, Lancelot and Bors, are showered with glory by the court. However, it should also be noted that when their individual journeys are closely examined, it becomes apparent that both knights have undergone an extreme penitential process in an attempt to prove that they are worthy candidates for the exclusive Grail fellowship. This penitential process has challenged each knight to examine in detail his intentions and either rewarded the knight for coming to an understanding of the Christian ideal and invited him to join the Grail fellowship or punished him because he continues to use violence as a means of having his own needs and desires met. I would argue that, although the Grail adventure does give the knights of the Round Table the opportunity to win great glory for the court of Arthur, Malory's *Sangreal* also demonstrates how the

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<sup>100</sup> Vinaver as quoted in Malory, *Works*, 1535.

<sup>101</sup> Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', 208.

court of Arthur has alienated itself from the Christian ideals of the justified use of violence. It is only by penance that the knights who have been alienated from spiritual ideals can return to God.

What the quest in Malory's *Sangreal* offers is a final opportunity for the knights of the Round Table to reform their knightly practices in accordance with the Christian ideals of justifiable violence before the scene is set for the destruction of Arthurian civilization. As justified violence can be assessed only by an examination of each knight's intentions when faced with a potentially violent situation, a close examination of the knight's Grail journey reveals whether or not he acts in accordance with these ideals. The exemplar of these ideals is Galahad, and the achievements of the other knights can be measured against his example. Once the knightly activities are read from a spiritual point of view, the alienation of Arthurian civilization from spiritual ideals becomes clear, as the reasons for its destruction on the Salisbury Plain in the final battle. Galahad's example demonstrates how each of the knights of the Round Table should have utilized their knightly skills. Their first concern should have been for the community they were defending, rather than for their own purposes. If they had followed the spiritual prescription of the Grail, rather than descending into a cycle of vengeance and violence committed to achieve this vengeance, the Arthurian civilization might have been saved.

If the Christian ideals of the correct use of violence do inform Malory's *Sangreal*, the question arises of how these particular ideals could have influenced Malory some two and a half centuries after they were formulated. An answer requires examination of the legend's previous versions. The earliest known version is Chrétien de Troyes' *le Conte du Graal*, written in the late twelfth century, through the legend's sacralization in Robert de Boron's cycle of *Joseph of Arimathea*, *Merlin* and *Perceval* and finally to Malory's direct source for the *Sangreal*, the anonymous French romance, *La Queste del Sainte Graal*, written about 1220. What these three versions show is that descriptions of knightly activities become more sacred and penitential. Each can be read as presenting, first, a pattern of alienation from spiritual ideals and, second, a path of return to these ideals and God. The knights are presented as striving to meet spiritual ideals that are

forgotten in the society where their quest begins. Therefore, an examination of their spiritual biographies will show whether or not the individual knights do, in fact, live up to the exacting ideals derived from such sources as Bernard's vision of the New Knighthood.

### **How Earlier Versions of the Grail Legend Shape this Analysis of Malory's *Sangreal***

The idea of alienation from and a return to spiritual ideals is a feature of the Grail legend that existed from its earliest form in Chrétien de Troyes' *le Conte du Graal*. A feature that makes this early version of the story intriguing is that it begins with a striking criticism of knighthood at the court of Arthur. Recent scholarship has identified an alternative view of the Arthurian world from the English chronicle tradition beginning with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and suggests that Chrétien's sources are unknown and may have been from the oral tradition. Unlike Geoffrey, Chrétien does not see the Arthurian civilization as a glorious example of chivalry, but rather as a civilization in decline, perhaps maintaining its past glory through its reputation rather than through its reality.

Donald Maddox argues that the five romances of Chrétien de Troyes depict a progressive decline in the Arthurian community, and in Chrétien's last romance, *le Conte du Graal*, illustrates this decline in the opening court scene.<sup>102</sup> Brigitte Cazelles adds that Perceval's story in Chrétien becomes a progressively anti-Arthurian, privileging the Grail fellowship as the centre and source of chivalric excellence. The definition of chivalry in the Grail court is markedly different from the definition of chivalry found at Arthur's court. The Arthurian court presents itself as being a centre of chivalric excellence but the description of the court when Perceval first arrives resists this reputation. Arthur sits dejected in his hall surrounded by feasting knights who appear oblivious to the threat from the Red Knight (924-929). Chrétien's Grail court insists on the importance of distinguishing between the appearance and the reality of a situation, which, as Cazelles says, invites the

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<sup>102</sup> Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien De Troyes: Once and Future Directions*, ed. Alastair Minnis, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature*, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 83.

aristocracy to avoid violence and to take on the role of peacemaker in society. The reader is left in no doubt that if Perceval had asked the required question and the maimed king had been restored to health, peace and order would return to the land (3554-3555). This, according to Cazelles, indicates that the chivalry of the Arthurian court promotes violence, the chivalry of the Grail court promotes peace and the challenge facing Perceval requires that he discards the chivalric ideals he has learned from those associated with the Arthurian court and embrace the chivalric ideals found at the Grail court.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Jean Frappier closely relates the description of Chrétien's patron, Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders, in the Prologue, to the chivalric goal of Perceval throughout which the attainment of worldly glory gives way to the realization of Christian humility and divine love.<sup>104</sup> If this point of view is accepted, there is a gulf separating knightly activities at Arthur's court and the spiritual ideals of the Grail court.

### ***Le Conte du Graal* by Chrétien de Troyes**

Even in its earliest known conception, *le Conte du Graal*, the Grail legend has an agenda of reform because it is concerned with the moral development of the knight. There is a clear distinction between a knight's achievements as a force for good or a force for evil. Initially this is presented through the eyes of Perceval, then through the eyes of his mother as she recounts the family's chivalric history and finally through Perceval's knightly activities. To the original readers of Chrétien's text, the object of a grail had no transcendent meaning outside this text, and presumably due to the author's untimely death, its meaning is not fully elucidated.<sup>105</sup> The use of the indefinite article, 'un' grail, throughout the story, rather than the definite article, 'le' grail, signifies that at this stage of the legend's development it concerned itself with secular values of knighthood because

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<sup>103</sup> Brigitte Cazelles, *The Unholy Grail: A Social Reading of Chrétien De Troyes Conte Du Graal, Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 115-178.

<sup>104</sup> Jean Frappier, 'Perceval or Le Conte Du Graal', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira B. Mahoney, *Arthurian Characters and Themes*, 5 (New York, NY and London: Garland, 2000), 175-200.

<sup>105</sup> David F. Hult, 'From Perceval to Galahad: A Missing Link?' in *'De Sens Rassis' Essays in Honour of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. Keith Busby, Bernard Guidot, Logan E. Whalen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 170.

there is nothing intrinsically holy about this grail.<sup>106</sup> Although this version of the legend remains unfinished, it categorizes knighthood in the same way Christian theories of the justification of violence do. This is a story of a chivalric education, told from the point of view of Perceval, in which his journey from what he believes is the settled world of the country estate to the court of King Arthur. Its purpose is to define the qualities required in a knight in the courtly sphere, and begins by characterising Perceval as an innocent ignorant of that courtly world.<sup>107</sup> Although Gauvain (Gawain in the English romance tradition) is featured extensively in *le Conte du Graal*, an analysis of his role is beyond the scope of this study because he is not one of the knights examined in the later chapters of the thesis.

In Chrétien's early version, Perceval's mother criticizes the courtly world because its intrinsic violence has killed her husband and two other sons as well as destroying the income potential of their estate. His mother's point of view influences his reaction to his first encounter with the knights of King Arthur's court. In this early version, when Perceval makes a positive assessment of the knights as a force for good, he defines them as angels, whereas when he makes a negative assessment of the knights as a force for evil, he defines them as devils. His challenge is to ensure that he uses his knightly skills as a force for good. This is to be tested by his ability to make discerning choices that reveal his ability to judge any situation that has the potential for violence correctly based on his understanding of the qualities that are required in a knight at the court of King Arthur. In short, Perceval must learn that his knightly prowess is to be used to benefit, not destroy, the surrounding community.

Chrétien initially portrays Perceval as a child of nature whose widowed mother has isolated him from the influence of the court and chivalry. He lives on his mother's estate and is involved with its administration. He pursues courtly pastimes, such as hunting, but knows of nothing outside this world. His perception of the role of knights in the outside world begins with his first encounter with them. Chrétien uses a sensory model to

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<sup>106</sup> Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', 203.

<sup>107</sup> Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste Del Saint Graal*, 96.

distinguish between the two opposing views of knighthood.<sup>108</sup> Perceval assumes from the sound of the approaching knights, the clattering of the trees against heavy metal, the clinking and clanking of mail shirts, spears banging on the spears, the creaking of the armour and shields and the ringing of iron, signifies that these knights are, in fact, devils.<sup>109</sup> Perceval's innocence of the world outside the realm of his mother's jurisdiction is illustrated by his comments:

By my soul, my lady and mother spoke the truth when she told me that devils are more frightening than anything in the world (113-116).<sup>110</sup>

This highlights how his mother's beliefs have influenced him. Having identified them as a force for evil by the hellish sounds their armour and equipment make within the forest, Perceval's naïveté and his innate confidence in his own physical prowess is shown when he says that he will defeat these 'devils' with his homemade hunting implements. Although Perceval's independence from his mother is emphasized, when he chooses not to cross himself in this situation as his mother advises, even within this secular context, his desire to fight in a righteous cause is identified (117-124). The nature of the righteous cause is one that opposes the enemies of God.

As the knights approach, Perceval revises his initial assessment of the knights as devils when another of his senses comes into play. The visual impact of the knights dazzles Perceval because they are clothed and equipped in the finest courtly accoutrements, which are gleaming, brightly and glinting as they catch the sun. He sees them no longer as a force for evil because he believes that something so handsome could only come from God and be a force for good. He assumes, therefore, that these knights must be angels (138) and he reconsiders his decision to fight them. He heeds mother's advice and

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<sup>108</sup> L.T. Topsfield, *Chrétien De Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 227. Topsfield attributes this to vainglory because Perceval is placing God, the angels and devils on the same plane as the knights and is judging them by their outward appearance only.

<sup>109</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *The Story of the Grail (Li Contes Del Graal) or Perceval*, trans. William W. Kibler, ed. Rupert T. Pickens, *Garland Library of Medieval Literature* 62 (New York, NY and London: Garland, 1990), 103-111. All further references in English will be to this version and found in the body of the thesis cited to the line number. The Old French references also will be to this version of the text but quoted in the footnotes

<sup>110</sup> In the Old French, 'Par m'ame, qui me dist ma mere, ma dame, Qui me dist que deable sont /Plus esfreé rien del mont'.

realizes that describing them as devils is a sin, and if they are angels he must adore and honour them (137-154).<sup>111</sup> The knights, realizing that Perceval may be of some use to them, stop and establish who they are. He is so overcome by the knight's appearance that he says that they are more beautiful than God and that he wants to become a knight himself (179-180).<sup>112</sup> Through his misconception, caused by reacting to his senses, Perceval places his faith in worldly, rather than spiritual, power.

From Chrétien through to Malory, the development of Perceval's character, as he reacts to particular situations, reflects the changing attitudes of the church and society towards chivalric ideals. Malory's characterization in his *Sangreal* demands that Perceval demonstrate he no longer makes decisions based upon physical appetites governed by sensory responses. His response must be spiritual, based on his unwavering faith in Christ. Both versions of the story examine the place of violence within chivalric ideals. Whereas Chrétien privileges courtly ideals of knighthood in order to reveal the dilemma of the knight as constituting a force for good or a force for evil, Malory privileges spiritual ideals to analyse the same dilemma. In essence, Chrétien's characterization of Perceval revels in the courtly ideal of the knights, and uses this particular system of values to consider two conflicting views of the knight. On one hand, knights can create great devastation; they are the devils about which Perceval's mother has warned him. On the other hand, knights can be a force for good, and this view influences Perceval to believe that they are angels more beautiful than God. This misconception inspires Perceval to leave his mother's home and follow the knights to King Arthur's court, leading to his chivalric education.

Yet, even though Chrétien's version of Perceval's story has a more secular focus, Perceval is required to demonstrate that he can attain the attributes of *miles Christi*, as

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<sup>111</sup> In the Old French, 'et dist: 'Ha! Sire Dex, merci! Ce sont ange que je voi ci. Hé! Voir, or ai gem out pechié, / Or ai ge mout mal exploitié/ Qui dis que c'estoient deable./ Ne me dist pas ma mere fable/ Qui me dist que il ange estoient/ Les plus beles choses qui soient/ Fors Deu, qui est plus biax que tuit./ Ci voi de Damedeu, ce cuit./ Car un si bel an I esgart/ Que li autre, se Dex me gart./ N'ont mie de biauté le disme./ Et si dist ma mere meisme/ Qu'an doit Deu croire et aorer/ Et soploier et enorer./ Et je aorerai cestui/ Et toz les enges avoec lui'.

<sup>112</sup> In the Old French, 'mes vos est plus biax que Dex. / Car fusse je or autretex'.

described by St Bernard. The prologue to the *le Conte du Graal* describes the natural qualities associated with this form of knighthood as he details the characteristics of his patron, ‘the most worthy man in all the Empire of Rome, Philip of Flanders’ (11-13).<sup>113</sup> He describes Philip as a man who loves true justice, loyalty and the church and despises all that is wicked (25-27).<sup>114</sup> Chrétien bases his assessment on the text of Matthew 6:2-4, which discusses how men close to God should distribute largesse:

Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be seen by men. Amen, I say unto you, they have received their reward. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth. That thy alms may be in secret, and thy father who seeth in secret will repay thee.<sup>115</sup>

Chrétien says that Philip is a man who gives charity without boasting, which makes Philip near to God because ‘God is charity’ (47).<sup>116</sup> Philip’s gifts to those in his service can be described as gifts of love because they are given by the urgings of Philip’s heart in hope of doing a good deed to another.<sup>117</sup> Chrétien’s pun on the word charity, taking its meaning as both love and charity, or associating love with Philip’s largess and generosity to those he employs, places this version of the Perceval story firmly in the courtly world, as well as linking that world to God. In the established order of the period, Chrétien’s gift to Philip, his story of the Grail, which he describes as ‘the best story/ that has ever been told in royal court’ (64-65),<sup>118</sup> is written for the glory of Philip, who has shown great love for Chrétien. But he hopes that Philip will show his love in a material way because this is how Philip expresses his love for those in his service.

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<sup>113</sup> In the Old French, ‘Qu’il le fet por le plus prodome/ Qui soit an l’empire de Rome/ C’est li cuens Phelipes de Flanders’.

<sup>114</sup> In the Old French, ‘Li cuens aime droite justise/ Et leaute et sainte Iglise, / Et tote vilenie het’.

<sup>115</sup> In the Latin, ‘cum ergo facies elemosynam, noli tuba canere ante te, sicut hypocritae faciunt in sysagogis et in vicis ut honorificentur ab hominibus. amen, dico vobis receperunt mercedem suam te autem faciente elemosynam nesciat sinistra tua quid faciat dextera tua. ut sit elemosyna tua in abscondito et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi’.

<sup>116</sup> In the Old French, Dex est Charitez.

<sup>117</sup> Topsfield turns to Bernard of Clairvaux to explain this way of thinking. He uses a Bernardine concept to describe Philip’s behaviour as *voluntas communis* or *caritas* that is willing to share good things with others, as opposed to *voluntas propria* or self will that refuses to share. See Topsfield, *Chrétien De Troyes*, 217.

<sup>118</sup> In the Old French, ‘Par le comandement le conte, / Qui soit contez an cort real’.

In this fictional world, charity is love expressed by material rewards given for good service by the governing lord. If Perceval learns to become a successful knight in the courtly sphere, he too can share in these material rewards, so evident in the gleaming armour and equipment he saw when he first caught sight of Arthur's knights. When this episode is read from this angle, it is possible to see the material rewards of the courtly world as a sign of God's goodness. These knights have received their wealth from a king who gives generously and who is near to God, just as Philip of Flanders is near to God because of the charity he bestows on those who serve him well. The education that Perceval receives requires that he performs good and correct service for his lord, but in Chrétien's story this will not be based on his physical prowess but on the choices he makes when he is confronted by different situations that test his commitment to chivalry. He must learn to become like Philip, a man, as Chrétien describes him in the prologue, who is fond of even temper, good faith, the church and who despises everything immoral but also a man who can give generously and support his subjects. These are the qualities that separate the knights who are righteous from the knights who are destroyers of the land.

Chrétien juxtaposes his assessment of Philip as being near to God to the assessment of chivalry provided by Perceval's mother. By reciting Perceval's family history, she demonstrates how the activities of knighthood can destroy their nobility and wealth. Her reaction to Perceval's excitement at meeting the knights is:

Fair son, I commend you to God, for I am most afraid on your account: you have seen, as I believe, the angels men complain of, who kill whatever they come upon (378-382).<sup>119</sup>

Perceval's father had sustained a wound between his legs, which had crippled him and his lands and treasure began to fall away (417-423).<sup>120</sup> This wound, identified as castration by modern commentators, intimately links the virility of the lord with the

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<sup>119</sup> In the Old French, 'Biax filz, a Deu te rant, / Que mout ai grant peor de toi:/ Tu as veü, si con je croi, / Les Enges don la gent se plaignent, / Qui ocient quan qu'il ataignent'.

<sup>120</sup> In the Old French, 'Vostre peres, si nel savez, / Fu par mi les haunches navrez, / Si que il mahaingna del cors. / Sa granz terre, ses granz tresors, / Que il avoit come prodrom, / Ala tot a perdicion, / Si cheï an grant povreté'.

fertility of the land.<sup>121</sup> Without this innate masculine strength provided by the landholder, the wealth and profitability of the land, which sustained an entire community could not be maintained and, in consequence, the family had lost its fortune. Since this family could no longer sustain itself by agriculture, Perceval's brothers were forced to leave the estate and find their fortunes elsewhere. Both of these brothers became knights and died in combat. Grief killed Perceval's father, and in Perceval's mother's eyes, only Perceval was left to regenerate the flagging fortunes.

In Chrétien's version of the Grail legend, the maintenance of order over the land is closely connected with good governance and peace. If the profitability and wealth-generating qualities of the land are lost, young men will search elsewhere for wealth and glory, leading them into knightly occupations and all the risks inherent in this life. If Perceval's father had not been wounded he could have maintained good governance of his estate and the family and tenants would have benefited. Perceval, his mother's last hope of maintaining the estate, has now been drawn away by the glamour of the knights. This potent motif, of a land devastated by the effects of knightly violence, is continually explored throughout the Tale. The effects of Perceval's actions at the Grail castle mirror the devastation of the land caused by the wound of his husband and the death in battle of his two brothers.

If a young knight can be educated in chivalric ideals, his knightly activities can help restore peace and justice to the land and to its communities. A particular episode during Perceval's journey to the Grail castle demonstrates that violence can be justified if motivated by the right intention. Motivating this intention is love, and Perceval fights a righteous battle to restore the peace and posterity of the community governed by his love-interest. This episode describes both the effects of violence driven by evil intentions and violence in a righteous cause, that restores peace. Having recently completed a basic training in knightly pursuits and having been dubbed a knight by Gornemant de Goort,

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<sup>121</sup> Richard Cavendish, *The Arthurian Legends and Their Meanings* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 140.

Perceval comes to a castle, which could be described as a wasteland (1729).<sup>122</sup> The scene is one of economic, political and religious desolation. The agents of authority, the four knights who greet Perceval at the gate, have suffered so much privation that they were weakened by famine and long vigils (1724-1728).<sup>123</sup> The basic economic and religious infrastructure is described as ruined, wasted, bare, and stark; the streets are empty and the houses deserted (1732-1734).<sup>124</sup> The two churches are in a state of ruin since the monks and nuns who inhabited and maintained them have deserted them, and there is no food for sale, as the mill and oven are not manned (1736-1750).<sup>125</sup> The effects of war on a community that cannot defend itself are vividly described.<sup>126</sup>

Perceval falls in love with the lady and defends this castle against the evil intentions of Clamadeu of the Islands. If Perceval does defeat Clamadeu, he will restore peace and prosperity to the land. What separates the intentions of Perceval from those of Clamadeu is consent. While the lady approaches Perceval and offers her love, which Perceval accepts because of the compassion he feels for her plight, Clamadeu forces his will upon her and demands that she submits. As stated in the Prologue, this episode explores love as

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<sup>122</sup> In this version of *le Conte du Graal*, the land outside the castle is described as 'land wasted' but this ties in with the Arthurian concept of the wasteland. In the Old French, 'Et s'il ot bien defors trovee'.

<sup>123</sup> In the Old French, 'Se bien esteüst as sergenz, / Mout fussent bel, mes il avoient/ Meseise eü tant qu'il estoient/ De geüner et de vellier, / Tel qu'an s'an poïst merveiller'.

<sup>124</sup> In the Old French, 'Que par tot la ou ilala/ Trova degastees les rues/ Et les meisons viez decheües, / Qu'home ne fame n'i avoit'.

<sup>125</sup> In the Old French, 'Deus mostiers an la vile avoit/ Qui estoient deus abaïes, / L'une de nonains esbaïes, / L'autre de moïnes esgarez, / Ne trova mie bien parez/ Les mostiers ne bien portanduz, / Ençois vit crevez et franduz/ Les murs et les torz descubertes, / Et les portes erent overtes/ Ausi de nuiz come de jorz. / Molins n'i mialt ne n'i cuist forz/ An nul leu de tot le chastel, / Ne n'i avoit pain ne gastel/ Ne rien nule qui fust a vandre/ Don l'an poïst un denier prandre'.

<sup>126</sup> Some commentators describe scenes depicting such devastation and loss in the tale as being depictions of Hell. See Ewa Justyna Slojka, 'The Pious Knight: Crusading Ideals, Purgatory, and the Grail Romances' (Harvard, MA: 2006), 94.

<http://dd8gh5yx7k.search.serialssolutions.com.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au/?genre=article&issn=04194209&title=Dissertation+Abstracts+International%2c+Section+A%3a+The+Humanities+and+Social+Sciences&volume=67&issue=5&date=20061101&atitle=The+Pious+Knight%3a+Crusading+Ideals%2c+Purgatory%2c+and+Grail+Romances&spage=1723&pages=1723&sid=EBSCO:MLA+International+Bibliography&aulast=Slojka%2c+Ewa+Justyna> (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008 at 2pm). I would argue that this is difficult to ascertain because the Christian context of Perceval's journey is not clear, as the romance remained unfinished at the time of Chrétien's death.

a vital force for good. Perceval chooses to defend this castle because of the love he feels for the lady. This episode gives a vivid account of justified and unjustified violence and the effect of the latter that on a community's economy.

Whether violence is justified or not is directly connected with the land and the community supported by the land. The use of violence must have the direct effect of creating conditions that improve, not destroy, productivity, and to be a successful ruler of the land and community requires someone who is able to defend the land against evil usurpers whose motivation is concerned with personal gain rather than a sense of responsibility to the community. Seen from this point of view, Perceval's mother's fears about Perceval leaving the family estate are reasonable. The estate is vulnerable to attack by knights who are only interested in personal gain, because the land is not protected. Another factor determines how the knights will affect the land and the community. Knights acting from an independent base, without being integrated into a recognized political structure, such as the Arthurian court, will act for their own interests. After Perceval defeats them, Clamadeu must agree to present himself to King Arthur so his activities are regulated by the chivalric ideals of the court.

When this episode is examined from an economic point of view, the courtly wealth that so dazzled Perceval when he first encountered the knights of Arthur is a signifier of a peaceful and just community. The determining factor in Perceval's decision to fight on behalf of the community of the castle was based upon his love of the lady, evoked by the compassion he feels for her wretched state. In the actual Grail episode of *le Conte du Graal* Perceval will again be confronted by a situation that should evoke his compassion. What emerges from the Grail adventure is an evaluation of Perceval's ability to judge a certain set of circumstances and to respond in a manner that creates good for the community. The nature of the Grail, and the meaning of the chivalric lesson Perceval is required to learn, are never revealed, perhaps because Chrétien died before he completed the Tale. But when Perceval encounters the Grail and the Rich Fisher King, the sensual delights provided by the Grail and the Grail castle so enchant Perceval that his judgment

is severely impaired and the decision he makes has dire consequences for the surrounding communities and the land.

Perceval arrives at the castle of the Grail ruled by the Rich Fisher King and he will be tested in the chivalric arts of diplomacy, but he fails because he does not make a discerning decision. Perceval receives sumptuous hospitality and is surrounded by luxury but he discovers that his host is frail and cannot stand up to greet him (3073-3075).<sup>127</sup> The Rich Fisher King gives Perceval a gift, a rare sword made from the finest Greek or Arabian gold with a scabbard made with Venetian embroidery (3128-3131).<sup>128</sup> Perceval is confronted with an entirely new situation. Whereas, in the other situations, a weak or frail ruler who cannot exercise military strength generally rules over a community that cannot support its inhabitants economically, in the Grail castle, a seemingly weak ruler presides over a castle that displays the wealth normally found in the castles of kings, counts, and emperors (3282-3283).<sup>129</sup> This suggests that Perceval has now entered a realm where supernatural forces are at work and that the lessons he has been taught in chivalric conduct in the world may not operate effectively in this otherworldly castle.

Perceval accepts this hospitality gratefully and behaves in a socially acceptable manner as he has been taught, but in this particular situation Perceval needs to follow the instincts of his heart, as he had done previously when he first encountered the knights in the forest and when he saved the lady's castle from the evil Clamadeu. Perceval watches the Grail regalia pass in astonishment and although all his instincts tell him:

But did not dare ask/ who was served from the grail (3209-3210).<sup>130</sup>

Perceval thinks of the warning given to him by his old master, Gornemant de Goort, not to say too much because talking too much can be a sin (1634).<sup>131</sup> What Perceval does not

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<sup>127</sup> In the Old French, 'Amis, ne vos soit grief/ Se ancontre vos ne me lief, / Que je n'an sui pas aiesiez'.

<sup>128</sup> In the Old French, 'Li ponz de l'espee fu d'or / Del meilleur d'Arrabe ou de Grece; / Li fuerres d'orffois de Venece: / Si richemant apareille'.

<sup>129</sup> In the Old French, 'Li mangiers fu et biax et buens: De toz les mes que rois ne cuens ne empereres'.

<sup>130</sup> In the Old French, 'Et n'osa mie demanda/ Del graal, cui l'an an servoit'.

understand is that he must now learn to follow his instincts and to make the point even more succinct the authoritative narrator remarks:

That at times it is just as wrong/ to keep too silent as to talk too much (3216-3217).<sup>132</sup>

Although the true significance of the Grail here in Chrétien cannot be ascertained due to the author's presumed untimely death, read within this context it appears to denote that the education Perceval has been undertaking should not impede the instinctual truth that has so far allowed him to be successful in previous episodes.

The Grail is paraded past Perceval several times during the course of the dinner but he still does not ask this pivotal question, even though he wishes to know (3268-3269).<sup>133</sup> Perceval's state of confusion remains with him as he attempts to reach a decision. He finally decides to follow his instincts but procrastinates when he decides to ask the question the following morning. When he awakes, he finds the castle empty and leaves. Eventually he meets a girl in the forest and the consequences of his decision to not ask about the Grail are explained to him. If Perceval had faith in his own instincts, rather than allowing confusion to cloud his judgement and had asked the question, the Rich Fisher King's wounds would have been healed, and he would have been able to rule in an effective manner (3554-3556).<sup>134</sup>

Perceval had been surrounded by luxury and had dined like an emperor at the Rich Fisher King's table, but he did not realize that this situation could be an illusion. Although the Grail castle seemed economically viable, the Rich Fisher King had demonstrated his frailty and weakness. This was perhaps the sign that Perceval should have interpreted that not all was well. It is this that demonstrates Perceval's lack of compassion and judgment. Perceval was shown the true nature of the Grail castle when he awoke the next

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<sup>131</sup> In the Old French, 'Qui trop parole pechié fet.' This statement is particularly poignant when it is read against Proverbs 10:19. In the Vulgate, 'in multiloquio peccatum non deerit qui autem moderatur labia sua prudentissimus est' [In the multitude of words there shall not want sin: but he that refraineth his lips is most wise].

<sup>132</sup> In the Old French, 'Quausi bien se puet an trop taire/ Con trop parler, a la foiee'.

<sup>133</sup> In the Old French, 'Mes il ne set cui l'an an sert, / Et si le voldroit mout savoir'.

<sup>134</sup> In the Old French, 'Que toz eüst regaaigniez/ Ses manbres et terre tenist, / Et si granz biens en avenist'.

morning and found it empty and abandoned. In its true form, the castle becomes a mirror to Perceval's family estate and his lack of compassion and judgment serve to remind the reader of his desertion of the family estate and his mother. In both cases the answer to the lack of economic viability rests with Perceval; he must assume responsibility as an effective ruler in order to return both the Grail castle and his family estate to a peaceful and just existence.

In Chrétien's unfinished version, Perceval does not have the opportunity to redeem himself. But within thirty years of Chrétien's death, other authors had not only finished the tale but had also attempted to define the mysterious object at its centre, the Grail. The four works that attempt to bring to a conclusion his unfinished version are known as the Continuations. The first is by an anonymous author, and the other three are by Wauchier de Denam, Gerbert de Montreuil and Manessier. Chrétien's version is at the heart of these works and any diversions from him can be traced to borrowings from other romances.<sup>135</sup> But another version would sacralize the object of the Grail itself and would take the question of governance into the spiritual province. The version of the Grail legend attributed to Robert de Boron not only supplied a new spiritual emphasis, at which the unfinished version of Chrétien's romance hinted, but was also the first to combine the Arthurian narratives in a cycle that gave a complete pseudo-history to the story of the Grail extending back to the crucifixion and forward to a future that would serve as a resolution to the entire Arthurian story.<sup>136</sup> His story of Perceval ends with the death of Arthur and the destruction of the fellowship of the Round Table.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Belief and Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 27-38.

<sup>136</sup> After an extensive literature search, I could not find any relevant commentary on this text. The following comments made regarding Robert de Boron's version of the Perceval story are based on my own reading of the text.

<sup>137</sup> Nigel Bryant, Introduction, Robert De Boron, *Merlin and the Grail: Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Percival: The Trilogy of Prose Romances Attributed to Robert De Boron*, trans. Nigel Bryant, *Arthurian Studies* 48 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), 1. This manuscript version of the entire work (commonly known as the Modena Manuscript) is a single and complete text, while the other complete manuscript (known as the *Didot-Perceval*) has passages that are so corrupted that modern scholarship questions whether these passages are errors of transcription. All further references will be to this version of the text in English and cited to page number.

In the third part of this cycle, Robert's version of Perceval, the third part of *le Roman du Graal*, remains concerned with the economic viability of the land and its communities as it follows the basic plotline of Chrétien's Grail story, but the emphasis to maintain this economic viability shifts to the spiritual realm. The question of obedience to God's will comes to the heart of the text. The new spiritual focus is indicated by the nature of the Grail itself. Robert gives it a pre-Arthurian history in his tale of *Joseph of Arimathea* and in the Perceval section he describes the Grail as 'the vessel given to Joseph [of Arimathea] in his prison (141).<sup>138</sup> The Grail in *Joseph of Arimathea* is the vessel that caught the Christ's blood when he was removed from the cross.<sup>139</sup> As Knight says, this is the version that fully Christianized the legend: the Grail legend here becomes a mechanism to compensate for the loss of Jerusalem after the Battle of Hattin. The focal point of Christian devotion could no longer be centred on the Holy Land itself as a touchstone for the Holy Presence as a physical entity within the world. A devotion to a Holy Presence had to be formulated as a focal point of worship that could connect Christians with the most sacred drama of the passion and resurrection. This new focal point of devotion was found within the mass itself as the Church in the West adopted the Doctrine of Transubstantiation at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. By incorporating the Holy Presence into the mass, the physicality of Christ became available to all. If the Grail is a relic of the Crucifixion, and contains the blood of Christ, its movement to the West indicates that the presence of Christ need not be restricted to one location. Christ and the Holy Spirit's presence can be found everywhere.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> In the Old French, 'le vaissel que nostre Sire donna a Joseph en le prison'. See Robert de Boron, *Le Roman du Graal: Manuscrit de Modène*, ed. Bernard Cerquiglini (Paris: Union Générale D'Éditions, 1981), 245. All further references to this text in the Old French will be to this edition and cited to page number.

<sup>139</sup> In the Old French, 'Lors li membra de son vaissal, et pensa que les gouttes qui chaoient [tombaient] seroient miels el vaissel que aillors. Lors prist Joseph le vaissel et le mist desos ses plaies: et les plaies des mains et des pies degoutoient el vaissel. Et quant li sans fu recues el vaissel, si le mist Joseph lés [avec] lui, et prist le cors Jhesucrist, si l'envolepa en un drap que il avoit achaté a son oués [pour lui meme] et l'en covri'. In the English, 'And then he remembered his vessel, and thought the drops of blood that were falling would be better in the vessel than elsewhere. So he placed it beneath Christ's wounds; and blood from the wounds in His hands and His feet dripped into the vessel. After gathering the blood in the vessel Joseph sat it to one side, and took the body of Jesus Christ and wrapped it in a sheet that he had bought for his own use, and covered it'.

<sup>140</sup> Knight, 'From Jerusalem to Camelot: King Arthur and the Crusades', 226.

In the version of *Perceval* probably authored by Robert the ideals of the Holy Presence are found at the beginning of the Tale, which opens with a description of the Arthurian court. Like Chrétien, the author privileges economic viability and the generosity of the ruler as markers of the forces of good. In the opening paragraph, Arthur's court is portrayed as a centre of love. Arthur is a 'valiant king'<sup>141</sup> whose generosity is expressed when he bestows gifts upon his subjects. No knight is considered worthy unless he has spent a year at Arthur's court and has received 'a sleeve or pennon'<sup>142</sup> from Arthur himself (116). Perceval's father, a descendent of Joseph of Arimathea and son of the current keeper of the Grail, Bron, who is also known as the Rich Fisher King, wants to send Perceval to Arthur's court for his chivalric training. Immediately, a new direction in the story of Perceval has emerged, while Chrétien's view of knighthood remains ambivalent throughout his version, the author sanctifies knighthood, specially that form which is modelled by the Arthurian court. Perceval does benefit from time spent at the court, where he is made a knight of the Round Table, and is much loved by the others. Perceval's knightly qualities are shown when he wins a tournament held at Pentecost.<sup>143</sup>

Perceval is established as a knight *par excellence* but Robert turns to Chrétien's portrayal of Perceval as a knight who does not understand that his lack of courtesy is damaging to others. First, Perceval remains responsible for his mother's death because he left his family home, after his father's death, without telling her and she dies of grief.<sup>144</sup> This is a

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<sup>141</sup> In the Old French, 'vaillans rois (197)'.

<sup>142</sup> In the Old French, 'ou une manche ou un pennon (197)'.

<sup>143</sup> In the Old French, 'Et bien saciés que Percevaus fist le jor tant d'armes que il forjosta tous çaus de le Table Reonde aemplir. Et li rois qui molt fu vaillans et sages s'en vint a Perceval, et si li dist: «Sire cevaliers, des or vuel jou que vous soiés de ma maisnie et de le Table Reonde, et que vous demorés o moi. Et saciés que je vos volrai molt onerer d'or en avant [dorénavant]» (203)'. In the English, 'And know this: Perceval performed so well that day he out fraught all the knights of the Round Table, defeating Kay the seneschal, Yvain the son of King Uriens, and Lancelot of the Lake, and they all declared that he should fill the empty place at the Round Table. And the king, who was valiant and wise, came to Perceval and said to him: 'Sir knight, I wish you to reside with me from this time on, to be a knight of my household and of the Round Table. You may be sure I will pay you the utmost honour (118)'.

<sup>144</sup> In the Old French, 'Et tant en ot grant duel que ele en morut de le pensée (198)'. In the English, 'The thought of this so over whelmed her with grief that she died (115)'.

significant departure from Chrétien's version because she does not provide a family history and becomes a literary device to highlight Perceval's sin. Second, his success at the tournament held at Pentecost convinces Perceval that he has the right to take the empty seat at the Round Table that is 'destined for the finest knight in the world' (119).<sup>145</sup> Perceval is given this seat and immediately this glorious and abundant world of Arthur changes. Neither the stone beneath the seat nor the Fisher King will be whole again until 'the finest knight in the world' has many chivalric achievements and is led to the house of the Fisher King where he will watch the passing parade of the Grail regalia to ask who or what does the Grail serve. All of the peoples of Britain suffer because the land is placed under many enchantments until this prophecy is fulfilled (119-120).<sup>146</sup> As the author increasingly spiritualizes Chrétien's version of the legend, the nature of the deterioration of the economic viability of the land and the community it supports is increasingly tied to the land's relationship with God. Since Arthur has shown his disobedience to God's will, the land of Britain has become a wasteland. Economic viability becomes coupled with sin.

To explain Perceval's sin, the reader must turn to an episode in the first tale of this trilogy, *Joseph of Arimathea*. After Joseph leads his people out of the Holy Land and into the desert, the community surrounding Joseph becomes sinful. Their sinning has an immediate effect on the land when harvests fail and the people experience increasing hunger. When Joseph appeals to God and the Virgin Mary for a solution, a seat at a table blessed with abundance becomes a testing site for the sins of the people. This seat is a

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<sup>145</sup> In the Old French, '«Biaus amis, il senefie grant cose, car il i doit seoir li mielres cevaliers del monde» (204)'.

<sup>146</sup> In the Old French, 'Et saces, rois Artus, que nostre Sire vos fait savoir que icil vaissiaus que nostre Sire donna a Joseph en le prison, saces que il est eb cest païs, et est apelés Graaus. Icil Rois Peschiere, si est cheüs en grant maladie et est cheüs en grant enfermeté [infirmité], et bien saces que rios n'ara jamais garrison, ne sera il pierre rasoldée del liu de la Table reounde u Percevaus s'asist dusqu'adont que [jusqu'à ce que] uns cevaliers ait tant fait d'armes et de bontés et de proueces de çaus meïsme quisont assis a cele Table. Et quant cil cevaliers sera si essauciés sor tos homes, et ara le pris de ls chevalerie del siecle, quant il ara tant fait, si l'asenera Deus [dieu le guidera] a le maison le rice Roi Pescheor. Et lors quant il avra demandé que [ce que] on en fait et cui on en sert cel Graal, lors quant il ara çou demandé, si sera li Rois Peschiere garis, et sera li pierre rasoldée del liu de le Table Reounde, et charont li encantement [et disparaîtront les enchantements] qui hui cest jor sont en le terre de Bretagne (205-206)'.

signifier of the place of Judas Iscariot at the Last Supper, and, therefore, represents the betrayal of Christ (35).<sup>147</sup> Only those without sin can come to this seat, and the consequences of disobeying the God's will are shown when a sinner called Moyse sits in the seat and is swallowed by the earth into the abyss (37-38).<sup>148</sup> Although Perceval has demonstrated his knightly capacities at the tournament held at Pentecost, his demand to sit at a seat designated for the finest Knight in the world shows that he does not understand the moral and spiritual virtues associated with chivalry. Arthur's complicity in this act of disobedience exposes the kingdom's lack of understanding in spiritual matters. While knightly prowess is privileged, the moral and spiritual aspects of chivalry are ignored. The effect of this action is to expose the sins of the kingdom and to plunge the land into suffering. This state is represented by the enchantments that come to Britain and in the state of the Fisher King, the descendent of the saintly Joseph of Arimathea.

The family of Joseph of Arimathea is the land's spiritual mirror. This elected family of Grail keepers, who hold the Holy Presence within the land, saves Perceval from the fate of Moyse, but because of Arthur's involvement in this sin, the entire land suffers and this suffering is personified in the Rich Fisher King. His wholeness or lack of wholeness is a measure of the Arthurian world's connection with God. As Arthur and his knights become increasingly disobedient to the laws of God, the health of the Fisher King deteriorates. Arthur should recognize that his kingdom is blessed by the presence of the Grail, whose goodness protects the kingdom with such abundance and he should give thanks for this blessing by maintaining God's law. Although the court will continue to function, its spiritual shadow, the court of the Fisher King, becomes debilitated. This situation cannot be reversed until Perceval makes suitable repentance, and the Grail quest becomes a process of penance.

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<sup>147</sup> In the Old French, 'Et saces que cil lius senefiera le liu don't Judas s'osta, quant il sot que il m'ot traï (55)'.

<sup>148</sup> In the Old French, 'Et quant il furent tout assis, Moÿs fu en estant [debout] et ot paor et alaentor la table, ne il ne set u il s'asiece fors les Joseph [sinon à côté de Joseph], si assist. Et quant il fu assis, si fu fondus tant tost et sambla que il n'eüst onques esté. Et quant cil qui seoient a table virent çou, si en furent molt esmaïé de celui qui ensi fu perdus entre aus (59-60)'.

This turn of events does have immediate repercussions for Arthur's Round Table when all the knights declare that they will set out on the Grail quest. The state of the Round Table parallels the state of weakness in the Fisher King. As the Fisher King is no longer whole, the fellowship of the Round Table breaks down as each knight departs on his own separate quest to find the Grail castle, enduring, as the author says, many hardships (120). But the author chooses to follow Perceval's story because, ultimately, in this version of the legend he is the Grail hero, who is destined to heal the Fisher King and remove the enchantments from the land. This is prophesied in the Tale concerning Joseph of Arimathea that his grandson, Alain li Gros, is destined to father 'a male child to whom my vessel is to come' (38).<sup>149</sup> This makes Perceval the heir to the Fisher King's spiritual realm, but he cannot fulfil this destiny while he remains in a state of sin. This episode is emblematic of the state of the kingdom. Both the king, Arthur, and his spiritual shadow, the Fisher King, have become debilitated by the sins of the kingdom, which are represented by the Round Table's emphasis on knightly prowess as a measure of success in chivalric terms. Perceval's quest is to find the Grail castle and to heal the Fisher King, so that the spiritual values that provided the kingdom with so much abundance can be restored.

The readers are led to the crux of these spiritual issues when Perceval approaches the Grail castle and has a vision of paradise. Two children are playing in the tree, and, after Perceval prays for guidance, the Holy Spirit speaks through one of the children. He is told that everyone belongs to God, but they are exiled from paradise because of the sin that came into the world when Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The purpose of the Grail quest is to lead God's creatures back to a state of earthly paradise, if they are worthy to receive this gift. The way to Paradise is represented as a path to the right, and if Perceval remains on this path he will achieve all that he has set out to do in the Grail quest (139).<sup>150</sup> What is emphasized is Perceval's responsibility for his own

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<sup>149</sup> In the Old French, 'Et li di que de lui doit issir uns hom malle a cui mes vaissiaus doit repairier [et dis lui que de lui doit naîtreun enfant male à qui mon vase doit revenir] 65'.

<sup>150</sup> In the Old French, '«Cevaliers qui nous as conjures, saces que de par Diu vivons nous. Et saces que de cel paradis terrestre don't Adan fu jeté venimes nos por parler a toi par le congié del saint Esperit. Tue s entré en le queste del Graal que Bron tes taions a en garde, que on apele en

salvation. Perceval must demonstrate that he follows the will of God obediently if he is to fulfil his destiny.

As in Chrétien's version, Perceval shows that he lacks the discernment to read the signs around him, and to follow the inclinations of his heart. Perceval's reaction is described as seeing the Grail as being 'filled with wonder' and he wants to ask about the Grail but as the author narrates, 'he was afraid of upsetting his host' (141).<sup>151</sup> Perceval proves himself unworthy and this is explained when he meets a woman after leaving the Grail castle. It is at this point that he learns his family history and his destiny. If Perceval had asked the question, he would be worthy to become the next Grail keeper and heir to the Fisher King. Perceval would have healed the wounds of the Fisher King and, by extension, the wounds of the land because 'the evils and enchantments which now beset the land of Britain would have been cast out' (143).<sup>152</sup> And as his ultimate reward, Perceval would have received absolution for his sins and would have gained automatic admission to Heaven upon his death (143).<sup>153</sup>

In this version Perceval is given the opportunity of redeeming himself when, after a series of adventures, he returns to the Grail castle. He asks the required question and the Fisher King is healed of his wound. Perceval acknowledges also his familial relationship to the Fisher King and learns that the purpose of the Grail is to delight the hearts of those who are worthy to remain in its presence because the Grail will not tolerate the presence of the sinful (155).<sup>154</sup> Britain is healed and this signified by the stone that split beneath him at

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mainte contrée le Roi Peschor. Et tu t'en iras ceste voie a destre par devant toi, et saces que ançois que quoi tu en isses [avant que tu en sortes] verras tel cose par quoi tu afineras ton travail se tu es teus [tel] que venir i doies» (242)'.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>151</sup> In the Old French, 'Et quant Percevaus le vit, si le tint a molt grant merveille et l'eüst molt volentiers demandé, se il ne cremist son oste anoier [s'il n'avait craint de contrarier son hôte] (245)'.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup> In the Old French, 'et fussent desfait li encantement et li malice qui or sont en le terre de Bretagne (248)'.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>153</sup> In the Old French, 'Après te mort fusses en la compagnie de çaus qui ont eü le commandement Jheuscris (248)'.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>154</sup> In the Old French, 'ne il ne poroit en sa compagnie souffrir pecié (270)'.<sup>154</sup>

Camelot repairing itself (156).<sup>155</sup> But Arthur's kingdom shows its propensity to sin because, even though the kingdom has now returned to its blessed state of abundance, the knights of the Round Table continue to seek out violence. Although Arthur will unite the kingdoms of France, Ireland and Denmark into his domain, he will overreach himself in an attempt to conquer Rome and displace God's representative in the world, the pope. Having intended to commit such a grave sin, Arthur's court is destroyed by Mordred's betrayal, and the people wait forty years to elect a new king because they hope Arthur returns. Perceval, the Grail keeper and the spiritual mirror of the kingdom, can only weep in despair at these events (171).<sup>156</sup>

The tragedy is that not all the knights understand the message of Grail, which is to follow the will of God, and he will provide abundantly for the entire kingdom. This version, presumed to have been authored by Robert de Boron, ends with a simple statement that nothing more is said about the Grail, implying that this vessel of God's grace has left the world and humanity's chance to regain the delights of an earthly paradise has been lost. In Christianizing the legend, he shows that good governance occurs because of a ruler's decision to obey the will of God, unlike Chrétien, who argues that good governance comes from the wisdom of secular rulers. Both Chrétien's version and the version attributed to Robert present Perceval as a young knight who gains wisdom through his adventures and, in the latter version, eventually assumes the responsibilities his birth and lineage have assigned him. Galahad displaces Perceval as the premier Grail knight in the next version of the Grail legend and Malory's source, *la Queste del Sainte Graal*. Malory's *Sangreal* is a radical reduction of this source. In the *Sangreal*, Perceval is no longer a young knight learning about proper chivalric practice. He is a fully-fledged member of the Round Table when the tale begins. But his literary past haunts him when his lack of judgment is shown. Having presented Perceval as a flawed character, both

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<sup>155</sup> In the Old French, 'Et chaïrent li encantement et derompirent par tot le mont. Et estoit a cel jor meïsmes li rois Artus a le Table Reounde que Merlins fonda, et orient un escrois [grincement] issi grant que il s'en esfreerent molt durement, et li pierre rasolda [la Pierre se ressounda] qui fendi desos Perceval quant il s'assit el liu vuit. Si lor vint a grant merveille, car il ne savoient que ce senefioit (271)'.

<sup>156</sup> In the Old French, 'Quant Percevaus l'entendi, si en plora por le pitié que il en ot. Et pria nostre Segnor que il eüst pitié de lor amés, car il les avoit molt amés (301)'.

Chrétien and Robert provide the framework for Malory to portray the knight's journeys through the wilderness landscape of the Grail quest as a spiritual journey, in which they either return to God or remain alienated from God. Perceval remains naïve in the *Sangreal* and is saved from sin by grace, and not his own actions. His story, as Malory presents it based on his source material in the *Queste*, presents a young knight who is so vulnerable to worldly temptations that he leaves knighthood to become a monk. How this transformation occurs is shown in the next chapter of this thesis.

Before proceeding with the chapters concerning the individual journeys of the knights, it is important to state how these journeys are investigated. Key situations with the potential to generate violence are identified, and the knight's response is described in terms of whether or not it involves violence on his part. The focus here is on the intentions that inform his decision, because it is his intentions that reveal whether or not he is worthy to join the exclusive fellowship of the Grail. The intentions underlying his response are either selfish or unselfish, with the implication that his ideals, at this stage, are either worldly or spiritual, respectively.

What this investigation shows, I will argue, is that the Grail fellowship is distinguished by its concern for the community in contrast to the Round Table fellowship of Arthurian civilization, which is too often concerned with the individual knight, and the pursuit of his personal needs and desires.

This case is argued through the detailed examination of each knight's journey that follows.

## Chapter Two Sir Perceval of Galis

Finally, brethren, be strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of his power. Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places

Ephesians 6:10-12.<sup>157</sup>

### Introduction

In its discussion of the nature of his new spiritual knighthood, Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood* opens with a description of two types of *milites Christi* or new knights. The first fights enemies of flesh and blood on an earthly plane who threaten the physical and material well-being of the faithful community of God. The second fights the spiritual enemies of the community who threaten its very existence by leading this community away from its Christian values. As Bernard says, armour of steel protects the first and armour of faith protects the second.<sup>158</sup> Bernard's descriptions correspond to two differing vocations frequently found in the landscape of medieval romance. First, he describes the role of the knight and second, he describes the role of the monk. Therefore the first soldier of Christ continues to live in the world and seeks to maintain his Christian values within secular institutions such as the court, whereas the second soldier of Christ withdraws from the world and seeks to maintain his Christian values in religious organizations such as monastic communities. When Perceval's Grail quest ends successfully and he becomes a member of the exclusive Grail fellowship, he does not return to the court of Arthur. Following the death of Galahad, Perceval chooses to join a monastic community in Sarras and takes religious clothing (1034.28). He abandons the

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<sup>157</sup> In the Latin, 'de cetero fratres confortamini in Domino et in potentia virtutis eius induite vos arma Dei ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem sed adversus principes et potestates adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum contra spiritalia nequitiae in caelestibus'.

<sup>158</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 29-31. In the Latin, 'Et quidem ubi solis viribus corporis corporeo fortiter hosti resistitur, id quidem ego tam non iudico mirum, quam nec rarum existimo. Sed et quando animi virtute vitis sive daemoniis bellum indicitur, ne hoc quidem mirabile, etsi laudabile dixeram, cum plenus monachis cernatur mundus (50)'.

life of a knight in order to become a monk. His journey through the Grail quest can be read as a preparation for his change in vocation, but what is central to both the interpretation of the knight and the monk in this context is that the purpose of both vocations is to fight evil forces threatening to destroy Christian communities.

The story of Perceval's transition from the life of a knight living in the world to the life of a monk living within a monastic order is found in chapter three of Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal*. An examination of the justification of violence within his story shows how these principles work in the spiritual, rather than material, realm. Perceval's use of violence revolves around his own internal battle to determine whether his faith in Christ is greater than his desire for physical pleasure and chivalric honour. His enemies are not flesh and blood knights to be defeated by his superior knightly prowess, but demonic beings attempting to draw him away from spiritual ideals of chivalry, enticing him with the sensual delights of the world. This battle has consequences for both Perceval and for Arthurian civilization. On a personal level, if he allows his own desires and appetites to override his obedience to the will of God, he becomes an agent of the devil rather than an agent of Christ and damns himself. But, more significantly for the entire Arthurian civilization, if he submits, he becomes the devil's champion and is destined to do battle with Christ's champion, Galahad.

Perceval's decision about whether he will give his allegiance to the devil and the values of this world, or to Christ and the values of heaven, is quasi-apocalyptic when it is read against Revelations 12:7.

And there was a great battle in Heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels.<sup>159</sup>

To avoid becoming the devil's champion, Perceval turns his back upon the Round Table when he joins the exclusive fellowship of the Grail. Both the physical delights of the court and the rewards of honour tempt him away from the path of Christ. Throughout his journey Perceval undergoes an extraordinary education, which encourages him to rely

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<sup>159</sup> In the Latin, 'et factum est proelium in caelo Michahel et angeli eius proeliabantur cum dracone et draco pugnabat et angeli eius'.

exclusively on his faith to provide everything he needs. This education reveals the two possibilities presented to Perceval during his Grail quest. He must decide either to follow the path of Christ in all that he does, or if he cannot renounce his own selfish desires and appetites, to follow the path of the devil. His decision to join a monastic community becomes understandable when his response to the spiritual challenges of the Grail quest are examined; these events demonstrate how easily Perceval forgets his spiritual lessons when he is surrounded by the temptations of the court.<sup>160</sup> The culmination of his quest within the walls of a monastery is, perhaps, his best protection against these rewards of honour and sensual delights, which have the potential to lead him into the devil's clutches.

Perceval's allegiance to spiritual ideals is tested when he is confronted by different temptations representing individual aspects of court life. He is encouraged to forget his devotion to spiritual ideals. The most overpowering courtly temptation Perceval faces is his desire to maintain his fellowship with the other knights of the Round Table. In the chapter of the *Sangreal* devoted to his adventures in the wilderness, Perceval struggles to overcome his craving, first, to eclipse Galahad in chivalric honours (905.18-21), and, second, when it becomes apparent to Perceval that this is not possible (905.22-24), to attempt to follow Galahad and keep company with him (909.34-35). Perceval's desperate need for companionship is apparent already before he leaves on his quest. The episode of the sword in a red marble stone demonstrates that Perceval's desire to maintain fellowship with other members of the Round Table overrides his own concern for his physical well being. A close examination of this episode demonstrates how Perceval's own needs and desires for fellowship place him in the way of harm.

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<sup>160</sup> P.E. Tucker, 'Chivalry in the *Morte*', in *Essays on Malory*, ed. J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 64-103, 91. Tucker states that a renunciation of a virtuous life in the world is only acceptable to Malory if a life of chivalry has failed.

### **Perceval's Desire to Remain in the World**

This episode begins when a mysterious sword in a red marble stone comes to Camelot during the Pentecostal feast just as Galahad arrives to signal the beginning of the Grail quest. This is the first indication that a new order of chivalry is being established, based on the ideals of the Grail, rather than the ideals of the Round Table. The sword has an inscription, which prohibits any but the best knight in the world from removing the sword from the stone (856.13-4) and its purpose is to make clear that this title belongs to Galahad. The arrival of the sword prompts Arthur to demand that his knights identify whether they are loyal to his sovereignty and the values of the world at Camelot, or whether their allegiance lies elsewhere.

The inscription of the sword says that only the best knight in the world can remove it. Arthur is anxious that this title should be bestowed on a knight who has proven himself loyal to the Round Table. He demands that Lancelot, Gawain and Perceval attempt to draw the sword in succession. Each response to Arthur's demand classifies the particular knight's spiritual understanding. First, Arthur asks Lancelot to attempt to remove the sword, stating that the sword obviously belongs to him because he is the best knight in the world. Lancelot's reputation has derived from his handling of knightly weapons, such as the lance and the sword, and his ability to be victorious in battles and tournaments.<sup>161</sup> But Lancelot shows that he understands that this title is not solely concerned with a knight's superior prowess and that a new standard for judging the qualities of the knight who will be considered the best has arrived at Camelot. He recognizes that this sword does not belong to him and states that any knight who is not destined to take the sword will not only fail but will be physically wounded because of his presumption that he is the best knight in the world (856.16-24). Second, Arthur orders Gawain to attempt to remove the sword. Gawain shows that he knows that he is not the best knight in the world by expressing his reservations but he follows Arthur's command because of his love and loyalty for the king (857.1-14). Finally, Perceval is asked by Arthur to draw the sword, and he attempts to do so, without hesitation, because he wants 'to keep Sir Gawain's company' (858.1). This is an extraordinary choice, demonstrating that Perceval has

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<sup>161</sup> Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 129.

placed all his faith in the values of the Round Table, especially since the knight he wishes to please, Gawain, is his father's murderer. Furthermore he intends to maintain this allegiance despite Lancelot's warning that disobeying the demands found in the sword's inscription could lead to a physical injury.

Thus, before the knights have left Camelot to pursue the truth of the Grail in the *Sangreal* Perceval has demonstrated his lack of spiritual understanding. In order to become a member of the exclusive Grail fellowship, as Perceval ultimately does, he must receive an education in the spiritual values of chivalry. Perceval must forego worldly ideals of chivalry and transfer his allegiance from Arthur and his fellow knights of the Round Table to Christ. To do this, he must learn to place his trust entirely in Christ. The new spiritual attitude Perceval has to adopt in order to become a Grail knight parallels the experience of the early Fathers of the Church who left the relative comforts of the cities to venture into the deserts, originally in Egypt but in later times to any unsettled area, to develop their relationship with God.<sup>162</sup> Like these early Church Fathers, Perceval must ward off the temptations of evil spirits who threaten to draw him into sin, thereby destroying his relationship with God. Perceval must give up the pleasures and rewards of the court, which lead him away from his unwavering devotion to Christ, through asceticism.

Perceval's success in this process of education is shown in two ways. First, he achieves a vision of the Grail, and second, he chooses to join a religious community at the end of the quest rather than return to Camelot. In the episode of the sword in the red marble, however, Perceval still wants to maintain his links with the court, that is the world, rather than looking past this life to his relationship with God, and this is characteristic of Perceval's entire journey to the Grail castle. A change in Perceval's allegiance is signalled in the wilderness landscape of the Grail journey. As I will demonstrate, he

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<sup>162</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 213-240. Perceval's experience in the Grail quest mirrors much of the Desert Father's experience as his final temptation is of a sexual nature.

switches his allegiance from Gawain to Galahad and indicates his desire for a spiritual rather than knightly life. This transition begins when both Perceval and Lancelot are defeated in a joust by Galahad. A hermit cries out to Galahad, 'God be with the, beste knight of the worlde!' (893.7). Perceval's instinctual, but still unconscious, understanding of spiritual principles is shown when he decides not to follow Galahad further into the wilderness, as Lancelot does, and instead to turn to the hermit for advice. Yet even his desire to keep company with Galahad represents only a partial understanding of the ideals of spiritual chivalry, because his motive is not entirely right. Perceval must find his own spiritual reward. Therefore his instinct to follow Galahad is only the beginning of his education in the spiritual ideals of the Grail's particular form of chivalry. As he is still longing for the human companionship of Galahad, rather than the spiritual companionship of Christ, this desire to maintain a fellowship with Galahad becomes the mechanism by which the devil attempts to seduce Perceval away from the ideals of the Grail. The devil will do this by encouraging Perceval's natural and instinctive envy for the title of best knight in the world, a title that will indeed belong to Perceval if he defeats Galahad in battle.

### **Perceval's Spiritual Instincts**

Two opposing aspects of Perceval's character have been identified. On the one hand, Perceval has spiritual instincts that inform his choices during the Grail quest as shown when he turns to the hermit for advice after Galahad defeats him. On the other hand, Perceval is influenced by his own passions and desires, of which the most significant is his desire to maintain his fellowship with other knights and his longing for the title of the best knight in the world. How these opposing aspects come into play is best explained by an examination of Perceval as he is introduced into the *Morte Darthur* in the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*. This examination demonstrates that Perceval is introduced to the Round Table as a knight with much spiritual potential, but his family has been decimated by their involvement with the Round Table fellowship. Both Perceval's father and brothers have been killed in their quest for chivalric honour. Perceval's choice during the Grail quest is between remaining a knight and suffering the same fate as his father and brothers or becoming a monk and breaking this family cycle of death and destruction, by

removing himself from the temptations of the court and his own desire to achieve chivalric honour.

When Perceval is first introduced to the court of Arthur and the Round Table, the miraculous signs surrounding his introduction point out that he is destined to live the life of the spirit, although he has the correct family credentials to become a member of the Round Table. His introduction acutely delineates how Arthur selects a knight for service to the Round Table and how a knight's spiritual potential is assessed. The difference between the ideals of the Round Table and the ideals of the Grail become clear. Perceval is introduced into the *Morte Darthur* by the formulaic method of a young man coming to the court in the company of an older and more experienced member of his family who has been inducted previously into the Round Table (610.32). The ideas of the Arthurian court are illustrated immediately when the king asks 'Of what lygnage is he come?' (610.35). The knight accompanying Perceval explains that he is the son of King Pellynore, who has done service for Arthur, and that his brother is Sir Lamorak de Galys, who is described as a good knight (610.4). Arthur judges that Perceval is a suitable candidate for the order of knighthood and membership of the Round Table because he has been born into an aristocratic family who have shown their loyalty to the king by their past knightly deeds. What Arthur prioritizes in the selection of knights is shown further when Perceval is to sit 'amonge meane knyghtes,' those knights who have not established themselves as outstanding in their knightly feats at the court of Arthur (611.17). At this stage in his knightly career, Perceval has not yet established his credentials on the tournament field or the battlefield and thus is judged to be the same as all young aristocratic men who come to court seeking the rewards of honour and sensual delights. The standards by which he is judged by Arthur's court are essentially worldly.

Perceval's true destiny, however, is established by a supernatural event. A maiden from the Queen's court, who is described as being unable to speak and who comes from a high aristocratic lineage, leads Perceval away from the mean knights. She, miraculously, announces that he is not only a noble knight but that he is also God's knight, and she leads him to the Sege Perillous (611.24-25). This momentous and mysterious event is

emphasized further when the maiden declares the ‘Sege apperteyneth to the and to none other’ (611.28-29). Perceval’s potential as a future Grail knight is signalled by this event. This becomes even more evident if this episode is read against Galahad’s arrival at Camelot in *The Departure* and his being led to the Sege Perillous (860.8-13).<sup>163</sup> When Perceval first appears in the *Sangreal*, he is introduced as a knight fully immersed in the worldly ideals of Camelot. Perceval tries to impress his worldly sovereign, Arthur, and fellow knights by attempting to remove the sword from the red marble as his king commanded and in support of his fellow knight, Gawain. His earlier introduction into the *Morte Darthur*, which occurs in the *Book of Tristan*, shows that Perceval is a knight who is blessed with the special grace of God. Perceval’s challenge in the wilderness of the Grail quest is to prove worthy of this special grace by demonstrating that he no longer adheres to the worldly values of the Round Table because the choices he makes during his later testing demonstrate that his soul can be moulded into a vessel that is able to receive the grace of God.<sup>164</sup>

Although Perceval’s true spiritual potential is shown unequivocally when he is led to the Sege Perillous, the activities of his knightly career will continue to be driven by his desire for the rewards of honour and the ideals of the court. This is shown vividly in an episode in the *Book of Tristram* when his mother describes how his father and two brothers were killed by knightly violence associated with the Arthurian court. She states that her husband, King Pellynore, was ‘shamefully slayne’ by Gawaine and Gaherys in a manner that was ‘not manly, but by treson’ (810.13). She was left to fend for herself and her four sons but her grief is deepened by the loss of her two elder sons in knightly combat (809.34-35). To prevent further loss to her family, she begs both her remaining sons to stay with her but Perceval and Aggovale refuse. They tell their mother that, because they are born of knightly families, they have no option but to leave their families and pursue a career as a knight. Neither Perceval nor Aggovale seems concerned about the effect this

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<sup>163</sup> This event demonstrated that moments when the Grail appears in the *Book of Tristram* are precursors of the actual events in the *Sangreal*. The spiritual natures of both Perceval and Galahad are introduced into the text by their ability to sit in the Sege Perillous.

<sup>164</sup> Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta, ‘The Enduring Sacred Strain: The Place of the *Tale of the Sankgreal* within Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, *Christianity and Literature* 47 (1997), 21-34, 21.

decision may have upon his family or loved ones. They argue that it is in their very nature to don arms and seek deeds that will bring them honour (810.6-7). Perceval's mother's final statement to her sons, that they should keep these events in mind (810.17), can be read either as a call to arms to avenge the deaths of their father and brothers, or as a statement that a new order of knighthood is required to halt this cycle of violence and death. However Perceval's mother warning is interpreted, his next adventures in the *Book of Tristram*, show that death and destruction can be avoided. A significant blood feud with the family of Lancelot is prevented by an appeal to spiritual ideals.

When Perceval leaves his mother he does not encounter Gawaine and Gaherys, his father's murderers. Instead he encounters a series of injustices, which he puts right with his knightly prowess. The last of these encounters occurs when Perceval arrives in a forest where he begins to joust with another knight. This episode demonstrates how a possible new cycle of violence between two knightly families can be avoided by turning first to reason and second to prayer. In this particular encounter, knightly violence is abandoned because Perceval and the other knight in this joust are matched so evenly that they both become exhausted after suffering potentially fatal injuries (816.12-15). When Perceval halts the fight (815.34-816.1), he discovers that his opponent is Sir Ector de Marys, brother of Lancelot (816.8-9). Both Perceval and Ector believe that their injuries will lead to death and consider how to make peace rather than promote a cycle of vengeance between the family of Perceval and the family of Ector. Ector uses reason to prevent this feud and suggests that Perceval not tell Lancelot that he is the knight who had killed Ector because another blood feud would begin (816.19-22). Perceval, conversely, takes a more spiritual approach and he begins to pray (816.28-29). He is praised by the narrator as one of the best knights in the world because of his true faith (816.29-30), and as his spiritual potential becomes increasingly obvious, this description is repeated on a number of occasions during his Grail journey in the *Sangreal*. His prayer is answered when the Grail appears and heals the wounds of both knights.<sup>165</sup> Although the cycles of violence and revenge found throughout the *Morte Darthur* can be avoided

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<sup>165</sup> Again, echoes of the *Sangreal* are found in this moment. Perceval is praised frequently for his true faith in spiritual ideals throughout his Grail journey.

using reason, it is faith that brings the hope of new life and peace. This bias towards faith is demonstrated further in the *Sangreal* when Ector is denied access to the Grail castle when the Grail is visible (1019.9-10).

Through this demonstration of his faith in prayers, Perceval distinguishes himself from the other knights of the Round Table. He distinguishes himself further by his decision to remain a virgin (816.35-36). The role of virginity in the Grail quest is perhaps best explained by examining how virginity was viewed by early Fathers of the Church such as Origen who lived in the first half of the third century. Origen wanted to find a solution for the old Platonic problem of how the diversity observed in the material world could emerge out of the original unity of the world of the Ideas.<sup>166</sup> He believed that any difference in the created being reflected a precise degree of decline from or progress to a common and original perfection. Every being was originally created as an equal to angels and God intended that these beings would stand forever in a rapt contemplation of his wisdom. But, if a being made a decision from his free will to neglect this contemplation, he was rejecting the life-giving warmth of God's presence. All that was left for these beings was a dull numbness and a feeling of unrelieved discontent. Only by learning to recover its earliest yearnings could the being open itself up again to the love of God. The world was filled with spirits who could lead the being either into sin or back to God. Piety and a firm resolve demonstrated a commitment to follow the angelic spirits back to God. If a being gave in to the temptations of the body, such as the desire for food or the sexual drive, it indicated a decision to cooperate with demons and to remain distant from God. Virginity was, therefore, a symbol of the original state of humankind before an individual's decisions had alienated him from God and from God's wisdom.<sup>167</sup> If Perceval is to live up to his spiritual potential, he must maintain his virginity in order to be able to receive the wisdom of God.

In the context of the ideals of spiritual chivalry, Perceval's faith in God and his purity as a virgin brings the vessel of grace to both Perceval and Ector and prevents an

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<sup>166</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 163.

<sup>167</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 163-170.

unnecessary feud between his own family and the family of Lancelot. Furthermore, the healing properties of the Grail provide evidence that faith is rewarded by grace. A sharp distinction has been drawn between the rewards of chivalry found at the Arthurian court, where prowess in battle is rewarded by honour or sensual delights, and the rewards of chivalry as dictated by the Grail, where peace and the healing of wounds are the rewards of faith. Perceval's prayers have facilitated this gift of grace. His journey through the Grail quest, however, teaches him that this grace is only available to those who are willing to devote their life to God. In Perceval's own particular case, he is placed in situations that resemble the adventures he may encounter in the world of the Arthurian court: his challenge is to prove that he can maintain his faith in this world. If he succeeds he becomes a member of the exclusive Grail fellowship.

### **Perceval's Instruction in Spiritual Ideals**

Perceval's spiritual education comprises a series of temptations in which he has to demonstrate that he can recognise the fiendish and devilish creatures that attempt to lead him into mortal sin, as well as those with saintly qualities who would keep him on a path to spiritual understanding. He is challenged to explore his inner psychological motivations when he considers the use of violence. To be successful he must reject the catalysts of violence that are now associated with the devil because they have been ignited and exacerbated by his worldly desires and appetites. To receive God's special grace in the Grail quest, Perceval has to learn to exist in the faith of Christ, which will educate him in a new set of values that redefine what forms of violence can be justified. He must forego his allegiance to Arthur and the Round Table and be prepared to fight his own internal battle against the rewards and delights of the court, which feed his carnal cravings.

Perceval is only partially successful in his quest because he comes to recognise how easily he can be tempted by the rewards of honour and sensual pleasures of the court. To protect himself from this danger he chooses not to return to Camelot at the end of the *Sangreal* but to live in a monastic community. His spiritual education teaches him that it is only through the grace of God that he avoids falling into mortal sin. Perceval's

education in the Grail quest reveals to him that the rewards gained through a life lived in the spirit can give equal satisfaction to the rewards gained through a life lived in the world. Perceval's first two encounters in the wilderness, arguably, provide a blueprint for the life of a monk, a life lived in the spirit rather than the flesh, is lived.

The first episode begins when Perceval encounters his aunt, a female hermit (905. 10-12). She was once called the Queen of the West Landis, and she describes herself as 'the queen of moste rychnesse in the worlde' (905.29). It is, however, her decision to forgo all her wealth and live in poverty that gives her true happiness (905.29-30). Without the trappings and responsibilities of the world, she can devote her life to God. The name of her former kingdom, the Waste Land, is incongruent. She associates this land with vast wealth, which, in terms of worldly ideals, would make this land far from 'waste'. But within the new spiritual ideals of the Grail, it is the distracting element of worldly riches that removes this land from the true devotion to God, and as a result the land is most certainly laid waste. Perceval's aunt's begins his education in the life of the spirit in two ways: first she provides a practical demonstration in asceticism, and second she acts as an historian of Perceval's family and the Round Table. Furthermore, in this capacity she outlines the appropriate application of violence within the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

The appropriate use of violence relates to Perceval's and Lancelot's recent encounter with Galahad who had defeated them both (892.30-893.19). Perceval accepts guidance in a manner which foregrounds his spiritual potential. Whereas Lancelot has ridden off to catch up with Galahad, Perceval returns to the female hermit to seek her advice because she previously admonished both that if they knew Galahad as well as she herself, they would not have fought with him (893.9-1). Perceval reveals that he is still acting on worldly values when he announces to his aunt that he is so ashamed of his defeat by Galahad that he wants to find him and fight him again so he can regain the honour he has lost in their previous encounter (905.19-21). In essence, he believes that he can regain his honour only by another violent confrontation. Perceval's aunt explains to him that this desire for worldly honour was the cause of his father's death under similar circumstances. If Perceval continues down this path, he will experience the same fate (905.23-24). His

meeting with his aunt reiterates the lesson he received when the appearance of the Grail healed his wounds in the *Book of Tristram*. If knights continue to use violent combat to increase their worldly honour, all that awaits them is death. It is faith that leads to life and peace.

When Perceval's aunt comes to explain the history of the Round Table, she further discriminates between the ideals of Arthur's court and those of the Grail. According to Perceval's aunt, Merlin established the Round Table as a representation of the world: the significance of its rounded shape. But this roundness also has another meaning because the table was created to uphold what is right in the world (906.15-17). These ideals have been established in the oath of allegiance to the values of the Round Table that each knight is required to reaffirm at the annual Pentecostal feast. The oath lays out clearly the laws governing the knights of the Round Table. This oath is a contractual agreement that ties the knights to Arthur because it demands that the knights receive all their worldly goods from the court. In return for faithful service to Arthur, the knight will receive the rewards of land and material wealth. If a knight breaks his oath, he forfeits the worship and lordship of Arthur and, in effect, his land and material wealth (120.14-19). Therefore, all the knights of the Round Table are tied to the court of Arthur which supplies all their physical and material needs.

The last provision of this Pentecostal oath defines the acceptable motivation for violence. A knight must never become involved in a 'wrongfull quarrell'; one that has been motivated by love or by the promise of worldly wealth (120.23-24). In terms of worldly chivalry, a bond of love, which convinces a knight to place his allegiance away from the king, or a quarrel, which promises the reward of wealth, encourages a knight to seek his worldly needs from outside the sphere of Arthur's influence. It gives the knight material resources that are not controlled by Arthur and therefore independent from the fellowship of the Round Table and the court. Although the Pentecostal Oath provides the Round Table fellowship with a moral framework, it also suggests that a wrongful quarrel is defined as a quarrel that threatens a knight's primary allegiance to Arthur.

By contrast, in his Grail quest Perceval must be willing to forgo his allegiance to Arthur and his ties to the court for a new set of values demonstrating his loyalty to God. The quest insists on a new set of values, which demands that God sanction any violent action. The outcome of this violent encounter is a return to Christian principles in the surrounding community. In his previous battle with Ector in the *Book of Tristram*, the efficacy of the oath was shown by Ector's restraint, and his appeal to reason prevented another blood feud between the family of Perceval and the family of Ector. But the prayers of Perceval and his pure faith in Christ saved both their lives by summoning the healing power of the Grail. The new spiritual authority of the Grail no longer follows the dictates of the law, it follows the dictates of grace, which Perceval must learn to live by. Hence, Perceval's journey through the wilderness requires that he develop an increasingly ascetic lifestyle, trusting that his every need will be supplied because of his faith in Christ. Perceval's aunt emphasizes the importance of grace in this new authority when she reminds Perceval that he will never win a battle against Galahad, who, as the representative of the new Grail values, does not have any peer. No earthly man's hands can overcome Galahad because he works by miracles, or by the grace of God (906.12-14).

The importance of asceticism is further emphasized when Perceval's aunt continues the history of the Round Table and explains how the promise of worldly honour and wealth is responsible for the splintering of families. The worldly rewards promised by the Round Table encourage knights from all over both the Christian and heathen world to come and visit the Arthurian court. The honour to be gained at the court is so enchanting that any knight who is accepted into the fellowship forgets his obligations to his family. This honour is attained through violence as individual knights battle against one another for the possibility of becoming known as the best knight in the world and so receive all the subsequent sensual rewards that this title bestows. The very same values that are so highly prized at Arthur's court lead to the constant need for violence, which has devastated Perceval's family. Additionally, this devastation is greater than Perceval realises. Not only have the enticements of honour killed his father and two brothers, but Perceval's own desire to win honour at Arthur's court has encouraged him to abandon his

mother to join the Round Table and has led to her death as a result of the grief she suffered when he left the family. Perceval's only comfort, having learned of his mother's death, is the knowledge that she died shaven (906.4-6). Perceval was, until this time, unaware that his mother had departed this life, precisely because of his entrapment in the world of the Round Table (906.24-26).

This is the turning point in Perceval's story, as he becomes aware that his knightly activities are having a devastating effect upon those whom he loves. He must forgo the values of the Round Table that were so evidenced by his behaviour in the episode of the sword in the red marble stone, when he was anxious to maintain the fellowship of his father's murderer. He must commit himself to the spiritual path that he was destined to take when the maiden led him to the Sege Perillous when he was first introduced to the court at Camelot. Having realised this truth about the pursuit of worldly honour at the court of Arthur, Perceval's education in the life of the spirit can begin in earnest. When Perceval's story is read from this point of view, the corrupting influence of the Arthurian court becomes obvious.

During the Grail quest, Perceval must come to realize how courtly influences corrupt his spiritual nature. He will not be given the opportunity to display his physical prowess. Instead he will encounter a series of supernatural beings who will aim to tempt him into sin. This move into the supernatural raises the stakes in the Grail quest. If Perceval is seduced by the temptations he will be giving his allegiance to the forces of the devil. Furthermore, if Perceval elects to join forces with the devil, he will become the devil's champion, and he will fight Galahad as Christ's champion for the title of the best knight in the world. However, if Perceval resists the devil's temptations he will be giving his allegiance to God and will join the fellowship of the Grail knights, whose ultimate goal is to heal the land by restoring strong and righteous authority to sovereign rulers. His aunt explains the temptations that Perceval must resist. Merlin, who had made the Round Table, prophesied that three fellows of this table would achieve the Grail adventure, but that two of the fellows would be virgins while the other would live in chastity. Moreover, he decreed that one of these knights would surpass his father 'as much as the lyon passith

the lybarde' (906. 34-35). Since Galahad has been identified as the knight who surpasses all others when he sat in the Sege Perillous at Pentecost, Perceval must resist any urge to fight him to become the best knight. He must also safeguard his virginity. If he can achieve this, he will win his battle against the devil's forces and remain a knight of Christ. At this point Perceval resolves not to fight Galahad but to 'love the felyship of hym' (907. 11).

Having now come to the spiritual realisation that he must see Galahad as an example of a knight of Christ, Perceval leaves his aunt to follow his spiritual quest. The next episode serves as his second lesson in spiritual instruction, in which he will learn of the dire consequences that will occur if he returns to a life governed by the ideals of worldly chivalry. This episode also confirms that the Grail's presence in the kingdom is to ensure that the land maintains the principles of Christianity. Perceval attends Mass the following morning and he sees a figure enclosed in an iron pew, later identified as Evelake. Evelake was the pagan king of Sarras, who, after his conversion to Christianity, accompanied Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail into this land. His wounds, inflicted by Christ's enemies, demonstrate that he is a properly pious character. His constant prayer reinforces his piety (908.3-18). Evelake is marked as a sinner because his blindness also indicates that he has disobeyed the will of God when he approached the Grail too closely (908.21-24). Four hundred years have elapsed since these events and Evelake endures life, sustained only by the Eucharistic host, until, through God's mercy, he receives a kiss from the knight who will achieve a full vision of the Grail. This illustration of Evelake carries important lessons for Perceval. He sees that a life lived in the world, rather than the spirit, means that he will suffer because he will be tempted to sin and if he does fall into sin, it will inflict wounds which often remain unhealed. This can be avoided only by an absolute faith in Christ. The reward for this faith is that Christ will supply all of Perceval's worldly needs. It illustrates that disobedience to the will of Christ also carries a heavy penalty.

Like Perceval, Evelake was divided between the life lived in the spirit and the life lived in the world. On one hand, Evelake has proven himself to be a knight of Christ because

he has suffered many wounds in battle against pagan enemies who would draw the people of the kingdom away from their true faith in Christ. But, on the other hand, he was also steeped in the quagmire of worldly ideals because in his pride he disobeyed the will of God and drew too close to the Grail. The result of this disobedience is a voluntary penance of living in the world and continuing to suffer from his many wounds until he meets the knight who will achieve the vision of the Grail, Galahad. If Perceval chooses to follow worldly ideals by following Galahad and, perhaps, fighting him for the honour of being known as the best knight in the world, he will also be left to suffer in the world because he has alienated himself from the will of God. He must, therefore, conquer his desire to search for Galahad and concentrate on finding his own spiritual path.

### **Perceval's Spiritual Battles**

Having now received this spiritual instruction, Perceval's testing as a worthy candidate for the exclusive Grail fellowship begins. Galahad shows he is a knight of superior physical prowess when he saves Perceval's life. On leaving the abbey Perceval meets twenty knights who are carrying a dead knight (909.8-10). Perceval succeeds in defeating the first knight, but seven others overcome him. Without Galahad's intervention, he would most certainly have been killed. Galahad demonstrates that he has not been overcome by emotion because he does not kill the knights, but forces a retreat. Perceval can no longer entertain ideas of defeating Galahad in combat and becoming the best knight in the world because he owes his life to Galahad. Thus Perceval's desire changes. Realizing that he will never defeat Galahad on the battle or tournament field, Perceval decides that he wishes to keep company with Galahad. He becomes determined to follow the spiritual example of Galahad.

The spiritual education Perceval is to receive during the Grail quest requires still further learning so that he comes to understand his own spiritual path. He is prevented from following Galahad when his horse is killed in the previous battle. In terms of chivalric ideals, the value of a knight's horse cannot be over-emphasized because all knightly warfare was conducted from horseback. Without a horse, a man engaged in military activities could not be defined as a knight because he could not fight as a knight. This

situation causes him 'grete sorow' because he can no longer follow Galahad, even to thank him for saving his life (909.32-5) and this sorrow becomes the mechanism by which the devil tempts Perceval to join his forces against Christ. Perceval's sorrow is based on his desire to remain in the world as a knight and at the present moment he is unable to see that his sorrow should lead to penance for the sins he has committed during his knightly career.<sup>168</sup> He has forgotten all the spiritual instruction he has received from his aunt and from the vision of Evelake. Thus, in his misery his decisions are based on his own desires and appetites.

Therefore Perceval's sorrow for the loss of his life as a knight becomes the mechanism by which devilish forces will attempt to draw Perceval away from Christ. Perceval's desperate desire to remain a knight results in Perceval pleading with a yeoman to give him a 'grete steede blacker than ony bere' (910.5). The ideals of worldly chivalry become apparent immediately when Perceval offers his services as a knight to the yeoman (910.6-9). The yeoman explains, however, that he owes his service to another knight, who owns this particular horse, and if he were to give the horse to Perceval, the other knight will kill him. If Perceval wants to take this horse he will have to take it by force. It is at this point that Perceval must make a critical choice. He needs a horse if he is to fulfil his desire to follow Galahad, but to do so he must commit an act of violence that could lead to the death of another man. Realizing his situation, Perceval decides not to engage in this act of violence, allows the yeoman to pass, and in his state of absolute powerlessness, sits under a tree and makes 'sorow oute of mesure' (910.20). Although Perceval demonstrates a reasoned response to this situation, it causes even greater emotional pain that allows the devil to continue his temptation.

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<sup>168</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that sorrow for spiritual reasons leads to repentance but sorrow for worldly reasons leads to death. Perceval is sorrowful because he can no longer act as a knight in the world. The devil can play on the sorrow and tempt Perceval into sin. In the Latin, 'quae enim secundum Deum tristitia est paenitentiam in salutem stabilem operatur saeculi autem tristitia mortem operatur'. In the English, 'For the sorrow that is according to God worketh penance, steadfast unto salvation; but the sorrow of the world worketh death'.

Perceval's decision not to fight for the black steed is proven to be correct because it returns with another knight riding it fully armed, and the yeoman follows this knight on a hackney. As the yeoman explains to Perceval he has been overcome by the knight and now fears that his lord will kill him (910.26-28). Confronted with such an injustice Perceval takes the yeoman's hackney and gives chase to the knight. When this knight kills the hackney in combat and leaves, refusing to fight Perceval on foot, Perceval is challenged again with his own powerlessness. At this point he gives up all his other trappings of knighthood and, in his despair, casts away his shield, helmet and sword (911.13-14). Perceval is so miserable that he says of himself:

Now am I a verrey wreche, cursed and moste unhappy of all other knyghtes (911.15-16).  
Demonic forces continue to exploit his sense of powerlessness and frustration.

In this state of sorrow Perceval makes an ill-considered decision that will have dire consequences throughout the rest of his Grail journey. This temptation begins at midnight when a woman asks him what he is doing. Having been stripped of all his knightly accoutrements, Perceval can reply only that he does neither good nor evil (911.22). The woman offers him a bargain: she will give him a horse if he agrees to do her bidding when she summons him. In his state of despair, Perceval immediately agrees to this bargain and he is given a black horse that is 'so grete and so well apparayled' (911.32-33). The horse Perceval receives, as his payment for the future services he will render, proves to be so fiendish that 'within an owre and lasse he bare hym foure dayes journey' (912.1-2) to a place of rough water. This journey leaves Perceval in no doubt that he has reached the hour of his death and at such a crisis point he remembers the lessons of his spiritual instruction and turns to his faith. He actively demonstrates this by making the sign of the cross on his forehead. The horse's true nature is now revealed as he jumps into the water, which burns so fiercely that Perceval realizes that this horse would have carried him all the way to Hell (912.9). Thus the horse has returned to his true home and, for the moment, Perceval has been saved from the devil's clutches.

Suddenly, Perceval realizes the mortal danger his sorrow has taken him. This is a significant moment for Perceval because he prays that God will keep from future

temptations that will endanger his soul (912.8). He comes to understand in a conscious manner that if he is to survive he must make decisions based on his faith in God. Demonic forces will continue to tempt him to become their champion against the peerless Galahad. They will do this by placing him in situations where worldly delights will make him forget his faith. Perceval has agreed already to a demonic pact; this occurred when in the depths of his misery he agreed to answer the lady's summons as payment for the fiendish horse. Thus Perceval's dilemma is made clear. Throughout the *Morte Darthur* Perceval is described as a knight blessed with divine favour as is shown in the descriptions of his adventures in the *Tale of Tristram*. But he is also a knight who could either be classified as a force for good if he successfully withstands the devil's temptations, or a force for evil if he is seduced by the devil. He will be confronted with a stark choice where he must choose to either place his allegiance with God or with the devil. Following this decision he will face his final temptation where he must guard his virginity, the sign that he is close to God, as the devil literally attempts to seduce Perceval. If he can maintain his virginity and not give in to the demonic temptations, he will prove himself worthy to join the exclusive fellowship of the Grail.

Perceval's spiritual preparation for this final battle occurs on top of a mountain on a remote island inhabited only by wild beasts. His geographical isolation will test his ability to make discerning choices. This isolation from the world of the court to a world inhabited only by wild beasts means that he will show that he can follow God from an instinctive, rather than reasoned, response. This response is demonstrated when he sees an old serpent carrying a young lion being chased by another lion. Perceval comes to the rescue of the young lion because his instinct tells him that the lion is 'the more naturall beste' (912.25). This episode shows that Perceval's natural loyalty is to spiritual, rather than worldly, ideals because he has read the spiritual signs surrounding this test correctly. To understand how Perceval's decision is correct, an analysis of the lion's meaning in medieval bestiaries is required.

The lion is the most common of bestiary animals and he carries his symbolic meaning as 'the king of the beasts' into the world of heraldry. It is often positioned first in the

bestiaries. The opening miniature of the ninth-century *Bern Physiologus* is the earliest extant lion entry and depicts Jacob blessing the lion of the tribe of Israel.<sup>169</sup> The association of the lion with the tribe of Judah is explained in Genesis 49: 8-10. Jacob, who has called all his sons together, prophesies the future of each of the tribes his sons will found. Of the tribe of Judah he says:

Juda, Thee shall thy brethren praise: thy hands shall be on the necks of thy enemies: the sons of thy father shall bow down to thee. Juda is a lion's whelp: to the prey, my son, thou art gone up: resting thou hast couched as a lion, and as a lioness, who shall rouse him? The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda, nor the ruler from his thigh, till he come that is to be sent, and he shall be the expectation of nations.<sup>170</sup>

This passage describes the history of the kings of Israel who will come from the tribe of Judah and whose bloodline will produce the king of all nations in the future. In other words this is a prophecy of the coming of Christ and the lion is directly associated with his incarnation on earth. In Revelations 5:5 the lion is directly associated with Christ again:

And one of the ancients said to me: Weep not; behold the lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.<sup>171</sup>

Another important image of the lion in bestiaries associates him with Christ. This is the image of the lion's whelps being born dead and being revived by their father three days after birth, associating the lion cubs with Christ who died on the cross and after three days was revived by the Father.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Margaret Haist, 'The Lion, Bloodline and Kingship', in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig, *Garland Medieval Casebooks*, 22 (New York, NY and London: Garland, 1999), 3-16, 3.

<sup>170</sup> In the Latin, 'Iuda te laudabunt frates tui manus tua in cervicibus inimicorum tuorum adorabunt te filii patris tui Catulus leonis Iuda a praeda fili mi ascendisti requiescens accubuisti ut leo et quasi leaena quis suscitabit eum Non auferetur sceptrum de Iuda et dux de femoribus eius donec veniat qui mittendus est et ipse erit expectatio gentium'.

<sup>171</sup> In the Latin, 'et unus de senioribus dicit mihi ne fleveris ecce vicit leo de tribu Iuda radix David aperire librum et septem signacula eius'.

<sup>172</sup> Other images associating the lion with Christ in the *Bern Physiologus* include the lion erasing its tracks with its tail and sleeping with its eyes open. Haist, 'The Lion, Bloodline and Kingship', 4-5.

During the twelfth century an addition was made to the lion entries in the bestiaries. In the St Petersburg's Bestiary a passage accompanying the image describes how men should emulate the character of the lion. Like the lion, rational men must not allow themselves to become angered and to oppress the innocent, in fact, men should follow the lion's example and spare the lives of those who prostrate themselves and ask for mercy. This develops a new theme to the lion images that mercy and tolerance are important and necessary aspects of justice.<sup>173</sup>

Although Perceval does not seem to understand the biblical associations of the lion, he thanks God for the lion's company as the lion acts more like a pet dog than a fierce wild beast in his company (912.35):

Whan the lyon saw that, he made no sembelante to fyghte with hym but made hym all the chere that a beest myghte make a man. (912.28-30).

In this short episode, Perceval's dilemma is solved. At the beginning of Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal*, Perceval is so concerned about the issue of fellowship that he attempts to remove the sword destined for Galahad from the stone. His reason for doing this is to keep fellowship with Gawain. Later his aunt explains the nature of the Round Table to him. It is a table of fellowship that celebrates the best knights in the world, but a belief in Christ is not a necessary requirement for membership as the Table also admits heathens to its fellowship. Finally, Perceval had to examine his desire for fellowship with Galahad. This desire had led Perceval into making a less than discerning decision to accept the fiendish horse of the lady that nearly led to his death and damnation. Now Perceval has found true fellowship with the lion. Symbolically he has discovered the fellowship of Christ.

This episode illuminates Perceval's own spiritual path, which is that he must look to Christ for fellowship and not to others who will draw him away from his faith. Now that Perceval has discovered his own personal spiritual truth he is praised in these terms:

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<sup>173</sup> Haist, 'The Lion, Bloodline and Kingship', 7.

He was at that tyme, one of the men whych moste beleved in Oure Lorde Jesu Chryste, for in tho dayes there was but fewe folkes at that tyme that beleved perfutely; for in tho dayes the sonne spared nat the fadir no more than a straunger (913.5-9).

If the knights do not perfectly believe in Christ, the values of the lion, which include tolerance and mercy, are destroyed by the world of men. This particular passage becomes even more noteworthy when it is read against Malachi 4:6, which says:

And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers: lest I come, and strike the earth with anathema.<sup>174</sup>

The purpose of Perceval's quest for the Grail is shown. To achieve peace in the world all must be united in a perfect faith in Christ. If men cannot achieve this state of belief the world is cursed, and as it will be seen in the last book of the *Morte Darthur*, the Arthurian civilization will be destroyed. Now that Perceval has attained this perfect state of belief, he prays to Christ that no temptation will bring him out of God's service and asks for his help to become Christ's true champion (913.12-13). Now Perceval and the lion lie down to sleep together.<sup>175</sup>

Perceval has shown that when he is removed from courtly temptations he can maintain his faith instinctively. His final spiritual test during his Grail journey will determine whether or not he can put these spiritual lessons into practice when he is confronted by the sensual pleasures of the court. Perceval has a dream vision where he sees two ladies who vie for his allegiance. The first lady is old and is seated on a serpent, and the second lady is young and is seated on a lion. The young lady on the lion approaches Perceval first and warns that tomorrow he will fight the strongest champion in the entire world (913.23). She warns Perceval that he must not succumb to the temptations of worldly

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<sup>174</sup> In the Latin, 'et convertet cor patrum ad filios et cor filiorum ad patres eorum ne forte veniam et percutiam terram anathemate'.

<sup>175</sup> This depiction of peace becomes even more striking when it is read against Isaiah 11:6-7. In the Latin, 'habitabit lupus eum agno at pardus cum hedo accubabit vitulus et leo et ovis simul morabuntur et puer parvulus minabit eos vitulus et ursus pascentur simul requiescent catuli eorum et leo quasi bos comedet paleas'. In the English, 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall feed them. The calf and the bear shall feed: their young shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox'. This depiction of Perceval and the lion lying down together demonstrates the peace that exists between all when Christ and the ideals of spiritual chivalry are followed.

chivalry because defeat against this champion will bring Perceval shame until the end of the world. After the young lady on the lion vanishes, the old lady on the serpent confronts Perceval. She asks him to redress the wrong he has done to her when he killed the serpent (913.35-36). The lady argues that Perceval's decision to defend the lion was not understandable because at that time the lion did not belong to him. Perceval replies that the lion has a more noble nature than the serpent (914.5). A consideration of the bestiaries has explained how Perceval reaches this conclusion.

The starting point to uncover the meaning of the serpent in Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal* is to consider the serpent's description in Malory's immediate source of the *Sangreal*, the French *Queste del Sainte Graal*. In the *Queste* the old lady asks Perceval whether he slays the beasts of the air without cause because they are disinherited.<sup>176</sup> What this description tells the audience is that the creature called a serpent in both Malory and the *Queste* is, in fact, a dragon. The bestiaries symbolize the dragon as the devil that tempts men with promises of glory and worldly pleasures. The foundational association of the dragon with the serpent is found in the Book of Revelation 12: 9, which says:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and satan, who seduceth the whole world; and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.<sup>177</sup>

Perceval's final temptation is most certainly a battle between the forces of good, symbolised by the lion, and the forces of evil, symbolised by the serpent. Although

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<sup>176</sup> *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. P.M. Matarasso (London: Penguin, 1969), 114. In Pauphilet's Old French version of the *Queste*, he refers to a serpent in the following, 'li serpenz et plus haut afere'. See *La Queste Del Sainte Graal: Roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, ed. Albert Pauphilet, *Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age*, 33 (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Éditeur, 1949), 98.6-7. In his modern French version, he also refers to this creature as a 'dragon'. See *La Queste Du Saint Graal: Translatée Des Manuscrits Du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, trans. Albert Pauphilet (Paris: Les Éditions De La Sirène, 1923), 111. In the version of the *Queste* found in the *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, IV, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. E. Jane Burns (New York, NY: Garland, 1995), 32, calls the creature 'a serpent but says that this creature has flown by chance'. This suggests wings and that the creature is a dragon rather than a serpent that would be envisaged as a snake. All further references to the Old French version of the *Queste* will be to Pauphilet's edition and cited in the footnotes to page and line number.

<sup>177</sup> In the Latin, 'et proiectus est draco ille magnus serpens antiquus qui vocatur Diabolus et Satanas qui seducit universum orbem proiectus est terram et angeli eius cum illo missi sunt'.

Perceval denies all responsibility for any injury suffered by the old lady for the death of her serpent, she asks him to become her man to make amends for his actions. Perceval is in danger of damnation but his spiritual instruction has taught him that he has to avoid this danger by refusing the lady's request. The Old Lady riding on the Beast can be read as a representation of the Whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation 17. Her purpose is to turn men away from the path of Christ to follow the path of the devil and how she achieves this aim is revealed in the following. See Revelation 17:2:

With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication; and they who inhabit the earth, have been made drunk with the wine of her whoredom.<sup>178</sup>

The old lady sees Perceval's absolute faith in Christ (914.13), but vows to take him when he has forgotten his service to God (914.15) because he will become drunk on the sensual delights of courtly life. Therefore, Perceval's final temptation is not a test of his physical strength and fighting ability as he would expect. It is a test of his ability to avoid those worldly temptations that will encourage him to forget his commitment to Christ.

At this point in the narrative, Perceval is fully committed to following the path of Christ and his reward for making this discerning choice is further spiritual instruction. He sees a ship covered in white samite, or a heavy silken cloth, coming towards the island. On board is a man dressed as a priest. The priest assures Perceval that he is as a true knight as required by the order of chivalry (914.31-32) and that he must remain true or the enemy he is about to encounter will kill him (914.34-35). To explain his point, the priest tells Perceval that the young lady on the lion was an illustration of the new law of the Holy Church. She represented faith, good hope, belief and baptism, and she seemed young because she was born of Christ's death and resurrection. It was for the great love of the Church that she came to warn Perceval of the great battle that he must now fight. On the other hand the old lady on the serpent represented the old law, and that the serpent that Perceval had killed was, indeed, the devil. If Perceval had agreed to become the old

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<sup>178</sup> In the Latin, 'cum qua fornicati sunt reges terrae et ebriati sunt qui inhabitant terram de vino prostitutionis eius'.

lady's man, he would have left the service of Christ. His return to the fellowship of the lion indicates that he has chosen to maintain his faith in Christ.

Perceval has now been fully prepared for his last and most dreadful temptation. His enemy is described in his Grail quest as a battle with the most dreadful enemy in the whole world (915.14). The test will occur in a court setting, asking Perceval to demonstrate that he can maintain these ideals when surrounded by the many rewards and temptations associated with the ideals of worldly chivalry. He must show that the luxuries of the court, with their physical pleasures and promises of worldly rewards such as honour and glory, will not corrupt the pure nature signified by his virginity. His final temptation is a direct assault on his virginity, the particular quality that distinguishes him as having a true faith in Christ and identifies him as having an essential attribute to qualify for the status of a Grail knight. If Perceval withstands the temptations of the court and keeps his virginity, he will join Galahad and Bors on the ship that carries the Grail knights to Castle Corbenic and Sarras. He will gain the very thing that he has craved most throughout his Grail journey: the companionship of other knights as a member of the spiritual fellowship of the Grail knights.

This final temptation begins when another ship arrives. Perceval should be alerted to the exact nature of the ship as being a product of fiendish forces because its description evokes the same image as the horse that attempted to carry Perceval to his death earlier in the chapter. Like the earlier fiendish horse, the ship is described as being as if 'all the wynde of the worlde had dryven it' (915.32-33) and being 'coverde with sylke more blacker than ony [beré] (915.35). To emphasize that it is the court that presents so many dangers to Perceval, he is confronted with temptations of the court as soon as the ship arrives. The first temptation is the sight of the gentlewoman on board who is described as being of great beauty and richly clothed. She immediately appeals to Perceval's physical appetites when she reminds him that he could die of hunger and mischief in such a desolate wilderness. Perceval's conscious understanding that he must remain firm in his resolve not to leave the service of Christ occurs when he reminds the lady of his faith by quoting from the Gospel of Matthew 7:7:

In hys service He woll nat suffir me to dye, for who that kno[ck]ith shall entir, and who that askith shall have; and who that sekith Hym, He hydyth Hym not unto Hys wordys (916.7-9).<sup>179</sup>

But the second temptation occurs when the lady offers to take Perceval to Galahad. This reference to Galahad makes Perceval forget his faith, and he readily agrees to become the lady's champion (916.10-22). Realizing that Perceval is succumbing to temptation as she arouses his envy, the lady continues to tempt him further by taunting him with a direct comparison between his own prowess and that of Galahad.<sup>180</sup> Perceval is told that, whereas the grace of God had saved Perceval when the fiendish horse came to the rough water, Galahad survived the incident because of his great prowess and had escaped into the land (916.28). Although Perceval is glad to hear of Galahad's survival, the lady has penetrated through Perceval's spiritual armour and can now lead him away from his faith.

The third temptation begins as the lady appeals to Perceval's physical appetites, reminding him of the lack of food he has endured since his arrival on this island and offers him food. Perceval says that he has been refreshed by the words of the priest on the first ship, the lady convinces him that this man 'ys an inchaunter and a multiplier of wordis' (916.31-917.2). Perceval had seen the example of Evelake, the king had been sustained for four hundred years by his faith in Christ as his only physical nourishment had been the host he received daily from the mass; Perceval has allowed his own desires to overwhelm him and he begins to fall prey to the lady's seduction. The lady tells him that he will starve to death on the rock and be eaten by wild beasts (917.3-4). Perceval not only forgets the comfort and fellowship he had received from the lion, he also falls into the sin of gluttony.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> See Matthew 7:7 In the Latin, 'petite et dabitur vobis quaerite et invenietis pulsate et aperietur vobis. In the English, 'Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you'.

<sup>180</sup> Proverbs 14: 30 explains how envy affects a person. In the Latin, 'vita cranium sanitas cordis putredo ossuum invidia' In the English, 'Soundness of heart is the life of the flesh: but envy is the rottenness of the bones'.

<sup>181</sup> The dangers of gluttony are explained in Proverbs 23: 1-3. In the Latin, 'quando sederis ut comedas cum principe diligenter adtende quae posita sunt ante faciem tuam'. In the English, 'When thou shalt sit to eat with a prince, consider diligently what is set before thy face. And put a knife to thy throat, if he be so that thou have thy soul in thy power. Be not desirous of his meats,

As Perceval indulges in this feast, the old lady riding upon the serpent sees that her plan to turn him away from Christ is working: he has indeed forgotten his faith in Christ and has returned to the ways of the court. He believes that the lady is merely offering him kindness. She continues to seduce Perceval into becoming her champion by appealing to his sense of compassion for those suffering because of an injustice. She reminds Perceval of his Round Table oath that states:

Ye ought nat to fayle no jantillwoman which ys disherite and she besought you of helpe  
(917.28-29).<sup>182</sup>

The lady will appeal to the values of the Round Table, rather than the values of the spirit, that have saved Perceval from death and damnation in the quest so far. She tells Perceval that the greatest man in the world has mistreated her (917.12-13). In a direct reference to God the Creator, she says that it was He would make her ‘so fayre and so clere,’ but she does acknowledge that she did develop a ‘litill pryde’ because of her beauty (917.14-15).<sup>183</sup> Because of this pride the lady was driven from his court and disinherited forever. Since that time, the lady has convinced men who are loyal to this great lord to become her men.

Perceval’s capacity to make a discerning decision is tested as he is surrounded by the comforts and luxuries of the court that remove him from the natural landscape where he was strengthened by the comfort of his companion lion, representing the comfort of faith in Christ. If Perceval reads this appeal to his emotions by the ideals of worldly chivalry,

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in which is the bread of deceit’. Gluttony, in this context, signifies that Perceval is drawn away from his faith in Christ because he no longer believes that his daily needs are supplied by faith. By accepting the gifts of the lady, he is being seduced into her power.

<sup>182</sup> The Round Table oath found at the end of the tale of *The Wedding of King Arthur* says, ‘always to do ladyes, damsels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [sucour:] strengthe hem in hir rightes, and never enforce them, uppon payne of dethe (120.20-23)’.

<sup>183</sup> Pride, often described as the worst of all sins, causes a complete negation of God within one’s life. See Psalm 9:23-26 in the Latin Vulgate, ‘in superbia impii ardet pauper capientur in sceleribus quae cogitaverunt quia laudavit impius desiderium animae suae et avarus ad plaudens sibi blasphemavit Dominum impius secundum altitudinem furoris sui non requiret necesse Dues in omnibus cogitationibus’. See Psalm 10: 2-4 in the English Douay-Rheims, ‘Whilst the wicked man is proud, the poor is set on fire: they are caught in the counsels which they devise. For the sinner is praised in the desires of his soul: and the unjust man is blessed. The sinner hath provoked the Lord, according to the multitude of his wrath, he will not seek him’.

he is compelled to help the lady. But, if Perceval is to maintain the spiritual ideals he has learned in the Grail quest, he must resist the temptation to help the lady because of the pity he feels for her or because of his commitment to the Round Table. As the temptation continues, the lady appeals to Perceval's desires and physical appetites in order to make him forget his commitment to Christ. She breaks through his spiritual armour with generosity and kindness. First, she calls for a pavilion to shield him from the heat. Showing his complete trust in the lady, Perceval unarms and sleeps in the cool of this shade. Second, when he awakes she feeds him with 'all maner of meetes that he cowde thynke on' and he also drinks 'the strengyst wyne that ever he dranke' (918.7-9). With all this attention Perceval begins to believe that he is falling in love with the lady, imagining that she is the most beautiful creature he has ever seen (918.11). Having now unarmed Perceval both physically and mentally, the lady will attempt to seduce Perceval literally, and if she succeeds she will remove the last vestiges of Perceval's spiritual armour as he loses his virginity. Perceval, weakened by the wine, food, the lady's kindness and the compassion he feels for her plight, agrees to become the lady's man by 'the feyth of my body!' (918.22).<sup>184</sup> If Perceval succumbs to the lady's seduction, he is lost to Christ, as he would have been won over to the devil's side and as such would have become the devil's champion.

When all seems lost, however, as Perceval lies naked in the bed with the lady, he is saved by the grace of God. He notices the cross on the pommel of his sword and remembers his promise to the priest in the ship. He demonstrates his return to spiritual ideals by making the sign of the cross on his forehead. The lady and all the courtly paraphernalia disappear. Perceval, realizing that it was his desires of the flesh that nearly led him into mortal sin, strikes himself in the thigh with his sword. This physical wound will remain a constant

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<sup>184</sup> Proverbs 6: 23-26 shows that lust does in fact take life away. In the Latin, 'quia mandatum lucerna est et lex lux et via vitae increpatio disciplinae ut custodiant te a muliere mala et a blanda lingua extraneae non concupiscat pulchritudinem eius cor tuum nec capiaris nutibus illius pretium enim scorti vix unius est panis mulier autem viri pretiosam animam capit'. In the English, 'because the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: That they may keep thee from the evil woman, and from the flattering tongue of the stranger. Let not thy heart covet her beauty, be not caught in her winks: For the price of a harlot is a scarce one loaf: but the woman catches the precious soul of a man'.

reminder of how close he came to totally isolating himself from the fellowship of Christ. Later, the priest in the ship returns and tells Perceval that the lady ‘was mayster fyende of helle, which hath pousté over all other devyllis’ (920.3-4). The priest confirms that Perceval would have been overcome if the grace of Jesus Christ had not saved him.

In the final analysis, Perceval in Malory’s *Tale of the Sangreal* is portrayed as ultimately holy and therefore able to maintain the integrity of the land through his knightly activities, but he is in danger of being seduced by the values of the court and the worldly rewards of honour and glory. This inherent weakness leaves him open to the temptations of the devil. If Perceval had not been granted this particular grace of God at the time of his near-seduction by the devil in the disguise of the whore of Babylon, he would have become the devil’s champion and who would have been pitted against God’s champion, Galahad, in an apocalyptic battle. But he does withstand this temptation and follows his destined spiritual path, which is to leave the world of the knight to embrace the life of a monk.

At the end of the *Sangreal*, Perceval’s reward is that he gains the fellowship he craves in holy orders, accompanied by Bors (1036.1-3). Yet only in death Perceval’s true desire is fulfilled, when he is buried near Galahad and his own sister. It is significant that what he cannot attain in life, he is given in death. It is an indictment of the Arthurian court that a Grail knight such as Perceval, with so much spiritual potential, cannot return to Camelot because its worldly focus would be too dangerous for him. Therefore, the question to be examined in the next chapter of this thesis is whether or not a knight can be both a member of the Round Table fellowship as well as a member of the Grail fellowship. It will investigate Bors’s journey through the Grail landscape to determine how a knight follows the ideals of spiritual chivalry in the world.

## Chapter Three Sir Bors de Ganys

‘Nay, madam,’ seyde he, ‘that shall I nat do tylle I have done my batayle, by the grace of God’  
(959.3-4).

### Introduction

Bors is set apart from the other successful Grail knights, Perceval and Galahad, in Malory’s *Tale of the Sangreal* by two factors. First, he is the only member of the exclusive Grail fellowship who returns to Arthur’s court and, second, Bors is not a virgin when he commences the quest like Perceval and Galahad. During his initial appearances in the *Morte Darthur* the reader is told that he has fathered a son, Elyne le Blanke (830.33). Malory’s source for the *Sangreal*, the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, exalted virginity to promote a severe form of asceticism as the ultimate measure of a knight’s worth within the spiritual ideals of chivalry.<sup>185</sup> Although fathering a son can be described as a sin in the context of the Grail legend only, this particular detail demonstrates that Bors has been lured away from his innate leanings towards the ideals of spiritual chivalry by a brief moment of physical pleasure. In essence, this detail shows that Bors is the one Grail knight who has an intimate knowledge of the world, and having attained this knowledge before the Grail quest begins, Bors can use it to navigate through the spiritual tests that confront him. It is his knowledge of the world that allows him to become both a Grail knight and to remain a member of the Round Table. This chapter will investigate how Bors achieves a balance between the ideals of spiritual and worldly chivalry.

Since Robert de Boron’s Christianization of the Grail legend, the idea of purity had become an increasingly highly prized attribute for those chosen souls who served the Grail.<sup>186</sup> In the *Queste*, this purity was marked by the Grail knights’ virginity or

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<sup>185</sup> Derek Brewer, ‘The Presentation of the Character of Lancelot: Chrétien to Malory’, in *Lancelot and Guinever: A Casebook*, ed. Lori J. Walters *Arthurian Characters And Themes* 4 (New York, NY and London: Garland, 1996), 3-27, 10.

<sup>186</sup> Robert De Boron, ‘Perceval’, 117-72. This version of the legend tracks the Grail’s sacred history and places its care into the hands of one family. One member of each generation is

chastity.<sup>187</sup> Bors's admission into the exclusive Grail fellowship in Malory's *Sangreal* is a significant departure from the stories of both Perceval and Galahad and shows how someone who has known the pleasures of the world can return to the path of Christ and to the ideals of spiritual chivalry by undertaking a formidable penance. As with the other successful Grail knights, the outcome of Bors's journey must be his willingness to give his primary allegiance to the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

Historically, allegiance posed many difficulties for knights during the late medieval period because they were not on a specific payroll. In times of war the knight could support himself through the spoils and ransoms, and through the tributes of the countryside, often exacted by threats of devastation with fire and sword. All these options disappeared in peacetime and to support himself the knight often had no other choice than to look for another war to fight. It was at this point the question of allegiance became important. The knight, having found his new war, had to consider whether his prior allegiance would prohibit him from forming bonds with his new lord. The prior receipt of honours, gifts, or a pension in exchange for an oath of loyalty seriously compromised a knight. A break with a former lord could be seen as treason if a betrayal of that allegiance was deemed a serious matter and a break with the companionship of chivalric fellowship, such as that of the Round Table, was considered deep treachery.<sup>188</sup> It is this tricky navigation of allegiance that Bors must face as he attempts to maintain his allegiance to both Arthurian and spiritual ideals of chivalry.

This problem of allegiance has plagued critical discussion surrounding Bors since Robert Lumiansky gave in 1958 what he considered to be the first detailed and isolated consideration of him. He argues that Bors is portrayed throughout the *Morte Darthur* as developing the renowned steadfastness that has given him the epithet of steadfast, or

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selected as the new Grail keeper. Throughout his journey to the Grail castle, Perceval is required to prove his fitness to become the next Grail keeper. At the end of the tale, Perceval is described as leading a 'saintly life' and being visited by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis, 171.

<sup>187</sup> Throughout the *Queste del sainte Graal*, the virginity of both Perceval and Galahad is frequently commented upon. As the *Queste* is Malory's source these ideas of sexual purity continue to remain important in the *Sangreal*.

<sup>188</sup> Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages*, 82-89.

stable, throughout the early and middle sections. This epithet provides the thematic contrast to the instability of Lancelot in the later part of the work. In essence Bors is portrayed, according to Lumiansky, as the protector of Lancelot.<sup>189</sup> This was generally accepted until Victoria L. Weiss argued recently that in books seven and eight of the *Morte Darthur*, Bors consistently compromises the religious values he displayed throughout his Grail journey in order to support Lancelot even when the causes Lancelot was defending were not worthy of his support. One example cited by Weiss turns Bors into a panderer who betrays his lord, Arthur, when he delivers messages between Lancelot and Guinevere.<sup>190</sup> These two critical views lie side-by-side as both consider Bors's role in the *Morte Darthur* according to his relationship with Lancelot. I would take these two facets of the same argument in another direction by turning to Dhira B. Mahoney's definition of the term 'stable'. Looking back to Malory's source material, the *Queste*, Mahoney argues that the source of the word 'stable' is, in fact, *religieuse* meaning pious, honest and good. If this argument is taken to its conclusion, stable as an adjective means perseverance in the pursuit of holiness, and implies withdrawal from the world.<sup>191</sup>

I argue that, closely following this definition, Mahoney brings us to the crux of the meaning of Bors's journey in the *Sangreal*. Bors's spiritual worthiness is exhibited when he joins the exclusive Grail fellowship because his primary allegiance is given to God rather than to either Lancelot or Arthur. I do, however, qualify the previous statement as referring specifically to an attitude found in the Grail quest. On his return to Arthur's court Bors's actions, especially during the civil war, demonstrate that his loyalty to Lancelot may on occasion overshadow his innate spiritual leanings.<sup>192</sup> Another point of

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<sup>189</sup> R.M. Lumiansky, 'Malory's Steadfast Bors', *Tulane Studies in English* 8 (1958), 5-20, 5.

<sup>190</sup> Victoria L. Weiss, 'Grail Knight or Boon Companion? The Inconsistent Sir Bors of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Studies in Philology* 94, (1997), 417-427, 419.

<sup>191</sup> Mahoney, 'The Truest and Holiest Tale', 25. Mahoney argues this in relation to the passage in which the religious man who takes his confession at the beginning of his journey describes him as, 'founde hym in so mervales a lyffe and so stable that he felte he was never gretly correpte in fleysshly lustes but in one tyme that he begat Elyan le Blanke (956.1-4)'.

<sup>192</sup> I would like to thank Associate Professor Andrew Lynch for reminding me that Lancelot has to restrain Bors when he encounters Arthur in battle and is in a position where he could kill Arthur (1192.5-19). However, I would argue that this episode does not diminish Bors's

interest in the Grail journey is that his allegiance to God is not tested by a direct confrontation with Lancelot; Bors's allegiance is tested by a confrontation with his brother, Lionel. However, there are points of departure between the portrayal of Bors and the portrayal of Lancelot. Whereas Bors has had one sexual encounter, he readily agrees to remain chaste and this defines him as stable. This places Bors at odds with Lancelot, who is known as unstable in the *Sangreal* because his love for Guinever prevents him from placing his full allegiance in the hands of God.

When Bors's journey is examined from this perspective, the issue of virginity and chastity takes on a wider meaning because it marks an individual's closeness or distance from God. In simple terms, virginity pointed to an ardent attachment to God whereas the commitment to lead a chaste life following a sexual transgression showed that an individual was a willing participant in a life of repentance and penance in the service of God.<sup>193</sup> Bors, who is required to embark upon a penance in the Grail quest because of his one sexual transgression, demonstrates his primary allegiance to God by adhering to the Christian principles governing the justification of violence through his Grail journey.

### **The Question of Allegiance**

Bors's tale examines the dangers of family affiliations by showing how connections to family interfere with a knight's path toward spiritual chivalry. As Pauline Matarasso points out in her study of Malory's source, the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, once Bors has announced his intention to become a knight of Christ, he is put through a program that is described in Matthew 10: 34-39<sup>194</sup>:

Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace but the sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her

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achievements as a member of the Grail fellowship, especially when it is read against the episode when Bors must choose between either being killed by his brother, Lionel or killing Lionel. As he lifts his sword to strike his brother, a miracle occurs in which both fall down in a swoon. In essence, he is rescued by God's grace (974.3-10). Both episodes show that on occasions Bors requires a little outside help to maintain the exacting ideals of the Grail.

<sup>193</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Brown and Glyn S. Burgess, eds, *Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo Norman Women* (London: Everyman, 1996), 17.

<sup>194</sup> Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste Del Saint Graal*, 156.

mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that lose his life for me, shall find it.<sup>195</sup>

The heart of Bors's tale in the *Sangreal* is the thorny question of allegiance and his greatest challenge in his journey is to show that his primary allegiance is to God even when his beloved friends and family are threatened with violence. It is a question that continues to plague Bors after the Grail quest when Bors allies himself with Lancelot, his uncle or cousin, in the civil war between Lancelot and Gawain in Book 8. Bors's actions in this civil war demonstrate the difficulty of maintaining Christian ideals of chivalry outside the Grail quest. However, the purpose of relating the knights' spiritual biographies during their Grail journey is to show why particular knights qualify for inclusion in the exclusive fellowship of the Grail. With this in mind, this chapter will concentrate on Bors's Grail journey to describe how the choices he makes when he is confronted by a situation that has the potential to become violent enable him to join the Grail fellowship. Since this is the major focus of his story, an analysis of his role in the last two books of the *Morte Darthur* is outside the scope of this thesis.

Many of the dilemmas Bors faces on his Grail quest require him to interpret events either through the Christian ideals of justified violence and through the Pentecostal Oath of the Round Table. In exchange for the lands Bors received from Arthur after the Roman War (245. 13-23), he is required to maintain the tenets of the Round Table Oath and renew the Oath annually at the Feast of Pentecost. This Oath is a statement of the chivalric values of Arthur's regime.<sup>196</sup> Bors finds he is required to maintain allegiance both to God and to

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<sup>195</sup> In the Latin, 'nolite arbitrari quia venerim mittere pacem in terram: non veni pacem mittere sed gladium. veni enim separare hominem adversus patrem suum, et filiam adversus matrem suam, et nurum adversus socrum suam. et inimici hominis domestici eius qui amat patrem aut matrem plus quam me non est me dignus; et qui amat filium aut filiam super me, non est me dignus. et qui non accipit crucem suam, et sequitur me non est me dignus. qui invenit animam suam perdet illam et qui perdidit animam suam propter me, inveniet eam'.

<sup>196</sup> The Round Table Oath, 'The kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes and gaff them rychesse and londys; and charged them never to do outerage nothir mourdir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfeiture [of their] worship and lordship

Arthur. During his Grail journey he is challenged to defend the rights of ladies, to resist the temptation to murder, and to avoid participating in any form of treason. However, he must watch also as a woman dies, rather than risk his own chastity, see his brother's life placed in jeopardy, as he protects another woman's virginity; and must stand back as he watches a fellow knight of the Round Table and a priest die, rather than commit unjustified violence to save their lives. His entire tale must be examined in minute detail to understand how Bors's apparently perverse behaviour proves his allegiance to both God and Arthur. He threads this delicate road by placing his own salvation at the heart of his decision-making.<sup>197</sup> Bors does give his primary allegiance to God but he can return to Arthur's court because he has also maintained the principles of the Pentecostal Oath.

Bors is the only member of the exclusive Grail fellowship who returns to Camelot at the end of the Grail quest and must attempt to incorporate the Christian ideals of justified violence into Arthur's court. He cannot do this successfully until the Arthurian civilization is destroyed and he leads the few remaining knights to settle in the Holy Land where they fight the enemies of Christ, described here as the Turks, and all are martyred on Good Friday (1260.8-15). The gap between the Christian ideals of justified violence and how violence is justified at the Arthurian court is firmly demonstrated when Bors's allegiance to God is compromised when he returns to the court and remains there until both Arthur and Lancelot are dead. Herein lies Bors's dilemma: whereas Perceval and Galahad have avoided ties of allegiance to Arthur because they have not been offered material rewards such as land, they can leave the *Morte Darthur* at the end of the *Sangreal*, but Bors must return to the Round Table because he has received a reward of land from Arthur. However, Bors does not travel to the Holy Land until after the death of Lancelot because he is also tied to the court emotionally through his uncle Lancelot and his brother Lionel. The trials Bors faces during the Grail quest revolve around his ability

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of kynge Arthure for evermore; and allways to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydows [sucour:] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongfull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis (120.15-24)?

<sup>197</sup> John B Marino, *The Grail Legend in Modern Literature, Arthurian Studies*, 59 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), 24.

to distinguish how violence is justified even when it conflicts with his own personal desire for worldly wealth and with his emotional ties to his family. Ultimately it is these ties that drag him back to the court. His destiny in the *Sangreal* is to become the Grail knight who follows the active life, or a spiritual life in the world, rather than the contemplative life, or a spiritual life in the cloister, like Perceval.

Bors's final journey and martyrdom in the Holy Land presents a fascinating final twist to Malory's *Sangreal*. This occurs in two separate but related aspects. First, just as Bors returns to the world after the Grail quest, the journey to the Holy Land takes the Grail story out of the otherworld and places it firmly in the realm of history. The journey through the supernatural landscape of the quest is concretized by an historical event, and the Grail, conceived as a set of chivalric ideals rather than as an object, is now made real by Bors. Second, this ending of the entire *Morte Darthur* links the tale of Bors directly to the new knighthood described in St Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood* because he is truly *miles Christi*. He is an ideal example of the knight who will, indeed, give up his life for Christ.<sup>198</sup> Thus the *Morte Darthur* ends with a tangible example of how a knight can perform acts of spiritual chivalry in the real world of history, rather than just in the otherworld of the Grail legend. Bors is, from this point of view, a true teacher of the principles of Christian chivalry. Furthermore, his actions are perhaps more commendable than those of other knights in the Grail quest because he receives only minimal spiritual advice from hermits, unlike Perceval, Lancelot, and Gawain, and he receives no spiritual nourishment as Perceval does from his companion lion. Whatever decisions Bors makes come from his conscience.<sup>199</sup> The Tale of Bors is, therefore, an excellent study of how a knight in the medieval period justified violence as epitomized in Malory's *Sangreal*.

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<sup>198</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 134. In the Latin, 'At vero Christi milites securi praeliantur praelia Domini sui, nequaquam metuantes aut de hostium caede peccatum, aut de sua nece periculum, quandoquidem mors pro Christo vel ferenda, vel inferenda, et nihil habeat criminis, et plurimum gloriae mereatur'.

<sup>199</sup> Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste Del Saint Graal*, 155. Matarasso's study remains relevant to Malory as well as the *Queste* because Malory has not altered this aspect of the Tale significantly.

### **Bors's Spiritual Choice**

Bors is the Grail knight who brings the Christian ideals of justified violence into the world to the extent that these ideals almost leap from the pages of the *Morte Darthur* into our own world. Bors's tale throughout the entire book is of a gradual awakening to these spiritual principles of chivalry. He begins his knightly career firmly placed in ideals of worldly and Arthurian chivalry when, in the *Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*, his outstanding service, in what becomes an aggressive war of conquest, is rewarded by worldly gifts of land in return for total allegiance to King Arthur (245.4-23). However, Bors begins his quest for spiritual ideals in the fourteenth chapter, *Launcelot and Elaine*, of the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*. This is where the future and potential Grail knights' spiritual promise is often examined first. The chapter opens with a reference to Whitsunday (or, as it is known in the opening chapter of the *Sangreal*, the feast of Pentecost) when a hermit announces the birth of Galahad who will sit at the Sege Perillous and 'wynne the Sankgreall' (791.19-20). The effect of this announcement is to draw attention to the coming of a new order in the Arthurian civilization in which the old Arthurian ideals of chivalry will be replaced with the new spiritual ideals. But this is still a future event and the knights of Camelot are, at the moment, secure in their Arthurian version of chivalry. This particular detail is important in Bors's tale because he is already a member of the Round Table and, as such, is participating in this glorious but Arthurian version of chivalry.

Bors demonstrates these Arthurian principles of chivalry as set down in the Pentecostal Oath when he fights and wins a joust against sir Bromell la Pleche who has threatened the life of his uncle, Lancelot. Bors spares sir Brommell's life when he asks for mercy but states that Sir Bommell receives this mercy 'uppon this coveaunte', emphasizing the legal nature of the joust because the Round Table Oath states that a knight must give mercy to all who ask for it (797.21-34). Thus Bors is introduced into the *Morte Darthur* as a knight who follows, without question, the precepts of chivalry as presented in the Arthurian world. This episode also highlights how Bors's loyalties are divided between the court of Arthur and his kinship group, in this episode represented by Lancelot. First, Bors confirms his allegiance to Arthur and the Round Table by following the

requirements of the Oath but second he instructs sir Brommell to yield to Lancelot at the next Whitsunday feast at Arthur's court. Although the initial threat was against Lancelot, and it is logical that sir Brommell should make reparations to Lancelot, any threat against Lancelot is also a threat against Arthur's sovereignty.

However, the discourse of rupture is ever present in the tale of Bors, beginning when he visits King Pelles and his daughter Elaine at Castle Corbenic and welcomes the infant Galahad into the world. Even though the Grail quest does not begin until Galahad reaches adulthood, Bors is confronted at this meeting by choices that will determine his success in the quest. He must choose to align himself either with the Arthurian ideals of chivalry, represented in this episode by his allegiance to his uncle Lancelot, or to the spiritual ideals of chivalry as represented by Lancelot's son, Galahad. But an appearance of the Grail at this point reveals the differing rewards associated with the two forms of chivalry, and guides Bors in his decision-making process. Ultimately this choice will demonstrate his fitness to join the exclusive fellowship of the Grail.

Bors's decision hinges on whether he perceives Galahad or Lancelot as the better knight. When Bors first sees the infant and immediately recognizes how much the child looks like Lancelot, he makes a prayer that shows he has not yet begun to understand the ideals of spiritual chivalry. Bors prays that this child will prove to be as good a knight as his father (798.20). At this point the Grail appears to the company and brings with it all the rewards of Arthurian chivalry as 'all maner of metys and drynkis' appear (798.23). But the maiden carrying the Grail says to Bors that Galahad will prove a much greater knight than his father and it will be Galahad who will sit in the Sege Perillous and who will achieve the adventure of the Grail (798.25-28). Bors reveals that he does instinctively understand the spiritual significance of this moment as he drops to his knees, with Pelles and Elaine, and all three make their devotions to God. The Grail responds in kind to this gesture by producing an odour so sweet that it seemed 'as all the spycery in the worlde had bene there' (798.30-31). Bors, Pelles, and Elaine are rewarded for their devotion by

being given a foretaste of paradise.<sup>200</sup> Bors has demonstrated that he does understand the spiritual significance of the birth of Galahad and his transformation into a Grail knight can begin.

Bors will have another experience of the Grail before he leaves King Pelles and Elaine. This adventure shows that Bors must break his allegiance to Lancelot if he is to advance in spiritual matters. It begins when Pelles explains to him that the only knights who receive worship at his castle are the knights who fulfil the following criteria: they must be of good living and they must love and fear God (799.7-9). Realizing that his reputation is at stake, Bors agrees to attend confession and is absolved of his one sexual indiscretion, leading to the birth of his son.<sup>201</sup> Bors is ready to begin his first spiritual battle, but he is wounded in the shoulder by a sword that appears to be suspended from the ceiling, which is his penance for his sexual sin (799.30-36). Having overcome his next knightly opponent, sir Bedyvere of the Streyte Marche, with much effort due to his wound, Bors will now be given a vision of the future of Camelot as it remains stuck in the quagmire of Arthurian chivalry.

The vision begins when Bors sees a hideous lion in his chamber. This lion takes Bors's shield and Bors responds by striking the lion down with his sword (800. 28-31). This is a difficult episode to interpret, and meaning can only be attained if the reader looks to other sources of medieval thought. As the text refers to an animal, this episode is best interpreted the medieval lore of the birds and beasts found in bestiaries. The bestiaries are collections of images and texts using birds and animals allegorically to discuss lessons on the proper ways a Christian might lead a moral life. Beasts, such as the lion, had specific

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<sup>200</sup> Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste Del Saint Graal*, 155. Matarasso argues that the vocabulary of fragrance and taste comes from the *Song of Songs* which traditionally predicated Christ and strengthens the view that this incredibly fragrant nature of this aspect of the Grail is a prelude to the final spiritual vision of the Grail as a vessel of the truth of transubstantiation in the Eucharist as it reminds Bors, Elaine and Pelles of the reward of salvation. As before, Matarasso's comments are referring to the *Queste* but remain relevant to Malory as well.

<sup>201</sup> Bors's decision to attend confession before his initial spiritual battle in the Grail castle links this episode in the *Book of Tristram* to the Grail adventures of the *Sangreal* because his first act when he leaves Arthur's court on his Grail quest is to find a confessor (955.17-20).

meanings that could portray both positive and negative attributes.<sup>202</sup> In Perceval's story the companion lion is a representation of Christ and his friendship with Perceval is a constant reminder of the knight's need to place his faith in the spiritual world rather than in the world. However, the lion that confronts Bors is very different and can be likened to the Old Testament images of the lion used by Gerald of Wales in his *On the Instruction of Princes* to describe the behaviour of England's Richard I.<sup>203</sup> Although Gerald shows that Richard does move to a more merciful mode of conduct, he initially describes him as having a strain of cruelty that he developed without cause. Arthurian chivalry is associated with cruelty that rulers showed when they exploited the poor in the medieval period.<sup>204</sup> Thus this image of the hideous lion depicts Arthurian chivalry in its most debased form.

The ideals of the Pentecostal Oath are forgotten as the knights use their knightly skills to gain worldly rewards of honour and the sensual pleasures of the court rather than care for those in the community who cannot defend themselves. It is the knights of the Round Table who are inflicting cruelty upon the population at large. Bors's defeat of this lion shows that a new order of chivalry is coming whereby those who embrace this new order, represented by the Grail fellowship, will defeat those who are excessively cruel. One intriguing aspect of this first vision of this lion is its possible association with Bors's beloved brother, Lionel, who will be shown in the Grail wilderness as an excessively cruel knight when he murders both a Holy Man and another knight of the Round Table who attempt to defend Bors against his wrath. Within Bors's Grail quest, Lionel becomes a paradigm of the worst aspects of Arthurian chivalry.

As Lionel's experience within the tale of Bors can be seen as an individual's moral destruction when he has chosen to follow only the ideals of Arthurian chivalry, Bors's

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<sup>202</sup> Carmen Brown, 'Bestiary Lessons on Pride and Lust', in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig, *Garland Medieval Casebooks* 22 (New York, NY and London: Garland, 1999), 53-67, 53-54.

<sup>203</sup> An example of the Old Testament image of the lion is found in Jeremiah 5:6 when the ferocity and cruelty of the lion is described in the following, 'idcirco percussit eos leo de silva'. In the English, 'Wherefore a lion out of the wood hath slain them'.

<sup>204</sup> Haist, 'The Lion, Bloodline and Kingship', 9-10.

next vision shows clearly what happens when an entire civilization lives by this paradigm. In this vision Bors sees that the old order is to be swept away and its corruption is highlighted as any trace of the glamour and glory that are usually associated with the court of Arthur is removed. Bors sees Arthur as a dangerous old dragon and Lancelot as a horrible old leopard (800.32-801.3). Arthur, by association with the bestiary image of the dragon, is linked to the devil and so, by implication, becomes an image of evil.<sup>205</sup> Lancelot has been previously described as a leopard in his earlier visit to Castle Corbenic when Galahad is conceived (793.4). This description emphasizes his divided nature because the leopard, in the ancient as well as the medieval period, has a divided genealogy. It is a creature born when a lion mates with another mythical big cat known as the pard.<sup>206</sup>

Lancelot has characteristics that link him both to the lion and to the pard. The lion denotes that he has the potential to become as great a knight as Galahad in spiritual terms, but because of his attachment to the world and, in particular, to the queen, Guinever, he will always follow the principles of Arthurian chivalry. This image of the leopard associates Lancelot also with a creature that is described in the *Song of Lewes*, written in 1269, as fierce, proud and so fickle that he is unable to keep his word.<sup>207</sup> He is a knight unable to forgo the rewards of Arthurian honour, which include the love of his sovereign's wife, for the fierce ascetic demands of the spiritual life. Unlike Bors, Lancelot cannot give up the physical pleasure of sex; this is evidenced in his unwillingness to forego temptation when Elaine, disguised as Guinever, moves to seduce him, the act in which Galahad is conceived. The two chivalric heroes to whom Bors has

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<sup>205</sup> Ann Payne, *Medieval Beasts* (London: British Library, 1990), 82.

<sup>206</sup> Nick Nicholas, 'A Conundrum of Cats: Pards and Their Relatives in Byzantium', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 40, (1999), 253-298, 279.

<sup>207</sup> Haist, 'The Lion, Bloodline and Kingship', 11. Again see Jeremiah 5:6 for a biblical description of the leopard, 'pardus vigilans super civitates eorum omnis qui egressus fuerit ex eis capietur'. In the English, 'a leopard watcheth for their cities, every one that shall go out thence shall be taken'. Although it may seem a long stretch to describe Lancelot, the great lover and knight, in these terms, what this particular reference shows is the negative connotations associated with the leopard and, for the purposes of this thesis, how the bestial nature of the knights does in fact affect the surrounding communities. It emphasizes why the chivalric ideals of the Arthurian civilization must be reformed.

given his allegiance have been effectively shown in this vision to be unworthy of this devotion. The result of both Arthur's and Lancelot's attachment to Arthurian chivalry is a terrible battle between the dragon and the leopard (801.3-4). This conflict intensifies as the old dragon spits out another hundred small dragons from his mouth and these small dragons destroy the old dragon (801.4-7). Bors is shown the future of Arthur's court as the conflict between Arthur and Lancelot deteriorates into civil war and lays the foundation for the next generation of knights led by Arthur's son, Mordred, to destroy Arthur and his civilization. This is the final outcome of a court ruled by the ideals of Arthurian, rather than spiritual, chivalry. These visions have shown decisively that Bors needs to reconsider his alliances if he hopes to continue his successful knightly career.

At this point an alternative alliance is introduced as an old man comes and sings a lay about Joseph of Arimathea's journey into Britain (801.10-12).<sup>208</sup> Bors is initiated into the story of spiritual chivalry, but he is not ready yet to embrace this new path fully and is ordered to leave Castle Corbenic because he will not have any more adventures at the present time (801.12-15). However, before Bors leaves he is given another vision of the results of the two paths of chivalry when a dove with a little golden censer in his mouth comes into the chamber depicting the presence of the Grail. Next an old man appears in the midst of four children, carrying a censer in one hand and the spear of vengeance in the other (801.21-24). The rewards of the two chivalric paths are made obvious. The Grail leads those who follow the spiritual principles of chivalry to salvation, but the sword of vengeance will eradicate those who follow the Arthurian principles of chivalry. The old man's final task is to send Bors back to Camelot with a message for Lancelot. Bors must explain to Lancelot that his sins are so great that, although he achieves much in the worldly realms because of his physical prowess, many others will outstrip him in spiritual matters (801.25-33). Bors is shown that if he continues to hero-worship

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<sup>208</sup> This is another instance that links the stories of the Grail in the *Book of Tristram* with the events of the *Sangreal*. The story of the Grail's arrival in Britain and the people's conversion to Christianity is told throughout the *Sangreal* to the other knights, Perceval and Galahad, who join the exclusive Grail fellowship. Galahad hears a version of this tale when he receives a shield belonging to King Evelake who was instrumental in this conversion (879.19-880.30). Perceval is also told the story when he visits Evelake in the chapel (908.13-21).

Lancelot, he is placing his very soul in danger. Bors must separate himself from Lancelot to follow the principles of spiritual chivalry and prove himself worthy of joining the exclusive Grail fellowship. Although the Grail reappears in the same spiritual guise, as the vessel of transubstantiation, which Bors will see when he returns to Castle Corbenic after his Grail journey, he is not worthy yet to witness its final spiritual truth.<sup>209</sup> He is ordered to leave but his relative success in this adventure is emphasized when Pelles celebrates his achievements the next morning (802.12). Bors returns to Camelot and tells Lancelot of his adventures as he was ordered during his vision. As always, Bors is a willing servant to the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

Throughout this entire episode Arthurian chivalry is contrasted with the new form of spiritual chivalry that Bors must adhere to in the Grail quest. He must leave behind all his former associations, such as his family relationships, and make decisions based upon what is good for the health of his soul. In the *Tale of the Sangreal*, this aspect of Bors's story is emphasized by his encounters with his spiritually bankrupt brother Lionel. The contrast between Bors and Lionel denotes the differences between spiritual and Arthurian chivalry within the *Sangreal*. Where Bors is shown as using violence in a measured manner to promote the common good, Lionel is shown using violence as a result of his extreme anger. Where Bors proves a paragon of spiritual chivalry, Lionel is described as a murderer (968.11) because, as Bernard says:

Danger or victory for a Christian depends on the disposition of his heart and not on the fortunes of war.<sup>210</sup>

Lionel uses violence when he is in 'the grip of vice' because his pride and wrath have overcome his better judgment and because he does not make the measured decisions when using violence that his brother makes in similar situations. Lionel is, in Christian terms, spiritually dead.

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<sup>209</sup> Again the Grail stories found in *Tristram* are linked to the *Sangreal*. Bors, like Lancelot at Castle Corbenic, is judged to be spiritually unworthy to see the Grail in its spiritual guise (1015.20-22).

<sup>210</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 131. In the Latin, 'ex cordis nempe affectu, non belli eventu, pensatur vel periculum, vel victoria christiani'.

The spiritual worth of Bors and Lionel is compared and contrasted throughout Bors's Grail journey as both come to represent the two extremes of spiritual and Arthurian chivalry. This contrast can be applied to Lancelot also in his adventures in the *Sangreal* as he struggles between these two positions. The importance of this triangle of characters is shown at the very beginning of the *Sangreal* in *The Departure*. Lancelot is asked to ride to an abbey with a gentlewoman where he will meet his now adolescent son, Galahad, for the first time and sees his two cousins, Bors and Lionel. This demonstrates the importance of their family relationships, their emotional closeness stressed by their joyful reunion (854.2-3). The connection of this kin group with the court of Arthur is emphasized when the king and queen welcome them warmly on their return to court (855.2-5).

At this point in the *Morte Darthur*, Bors's allegiances to his kinship group and to his sovereign are important to him. But, just as the pattern emerged in the *Tale of Launcelot and Elaine*, it will not be long until Bors's innate understanding of spiritual matters becomes apparent. When all the knights of the Round Table recognize Galahad as the knight who will achieve the Sangreal, Bors announces that:

Upon payne of my lyff thys yonge knyght shall com to grete worship (861.15-16).

Bors understands the spiritual significance of Galahad's association with the court of Arthur. If the knights of the Round Table follow the example of Galahad's spiritual chivalry the court will earn even greater honour and worship than it has already. As Galahad is announced as a knight who will win much worship, Bors's adventures in the Grail quest begin and his first act shows that he understood the lessons and visions he experienced in Castle Corbenic on a very conscious level. He begins his transformation into a knight who follows the ideals of spiritual chivalry without question.

### **Bors's Spiritual Journey and Penance**

The story of Bors's adventures in the Grail quest is found in chapter six of the *Tale of the Sangreal*. What strikes the reader initially about these adventures is his immediate understanding of the spiritual nature of the quest. His first act is to seek out a confessor and penance for his one sexual transgression (955.1-5). Nevertheless, he demonstrates his

desire to remain in the world as a knight, rather than fully embracing the religious life, for he says to his confessor that the knight who achieves the Grail gains much earthly worship (955.8-10). Bors's journey of compromise begins as he attempts to follow the precepts of Arthurian chivalry as they are set out in the Pentecostal Oath using the ideals of spiritual chivalry. It is this confessor who gives Bors the epithet that will remain with him throughout his quest. He will be known as stable or steadfast Bors because, no matter what is demanded of him in this time of spiritual trial, Bors bases all decisions on how the outcome affects his future salvation.

Bors is given another vision to increase his spiritual resolve as soon as he leaves to begin his penance. He sees an old dead tree with a great bird sitting on it. The tree is described as dry and without leaves, and cannot sustain itself or others who might come to rely on it. The great bird is sitting above many other birds that are described as 'dede for hungir' (956.9). In the later part of Bors's story, this image is explained by an abbot as a representation of the spiritual bankruptcy of the world without the goodness and mercy of Christ. This is a world that will never bear fruit nor sustain meaningful life (967.12-13). The old order of the Arthurian civilization is shown as spiritually bereft and Bors is told clearly that it is a system that cannot sustain itself. Yet the second part of the vision offers the solution to this spiritual bankruptcy. The great bird stabs itself in the breast and dies among the other birds. These other birds that were dying of hunger can now sustain themselves through the blood of the great bird (956.9-13). This image, recalling the iconography of the pelican, depicts the passion of Christ whose sacrifice on the cross brought new life to the world.<sup>211</sup> This vision can be seen in terms of the final spiritual truth of the Grail that will be revealed when Perceval, Galahad, and Bors reach Castle Corbenic at the end of the Grail quest. It is the blood of Christ that sustains the world and any form of chivalry not practised in the light of this spiritual knowledge will lead to the devastation described in the image of the barren tree and the birds dying of hunger. The chivalry of the Round Table is dismissed as spiritually bankrupt. Bors, who will now

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<sup>211</sup> In the bestiaries the actions of this great bird are depicted in the attributes of the pelican. The pelicans were seen in images as spilling their own blood for their children, which was an analogy for Christ's self-sacrifice for the salvation of mankind. See Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, 73.

begin a series of trials to demonstrate that he does truly understand what is required of a *miles Christi* or a knight who has proven himself worthy to join the exclusive Grail fellowship, must leave this old order of Arthurian chivalry behind.

The penance Bors endures throughout his trials develops a new meaning. Although Bors has one sexual transgression on his conscience, in his adventures in Castle Corbenic in *Launcelot and Elaine* he has made amends for this act in his adventures. His current penance, imposed by the religious man he meets as he begins his journey the Grail quest, has much wider implications. He has obviously sinned in the past because of his association with the ideals of Arthurian chivalry and its rewards. He must be willing to give up all the comforts of court in order to prove his spiritual worth. Rather than basing any decision on future rewards about to whom he will give his allegiance, he must show that he gives his allegiance only to causes that benefit the entire community by promoting justice and leading the community back to God.

Bors's vision has illustrated the significance of the Grail in Malory's *Morte Darthur*. The Grail is a set of spiritual ideals that describes a type of chivalry that requires the individual knight to leave behind the rewards of honour and the sensual delights of court, so that he can perform his entire knightly service following the will of God. Although this particular definition of spiritual chivalry has been illustrated throughout this reading of Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal*, what sets Bors apart from all the other knights, except Galahad, is his immediate understanding of this principle. He knows that the vision is a 'grete tokenynge' (956.14-15) and so, from this point of view, Bors can be truly described as stable or steady and is the knight of the Round Table that the other celebrated knights such as Lancelot, Gawain, and Arthur should emulate, especially if they hope to see the Arthurian civilization avoid destruction.

In the next episode Bors's understanding of the ideals of spiritual chivalry are immediately put to the test. In the first instance he is placed in a recognizable courtly situation where a beautiful young lady offers him food and shelter for the night. Bors's celebrated stability in spiritual matters is shown at once when he simply explains he

cannot partake of the delicacies and comforts offered to him (956.22-23). Having shown how seriously he takes his penance, Bors is now confronted with a decision about allegiance. The young lady explains that unless she finds a champion by tomorrow an older gentlewoman who has taken her land and introduced many evil customs will disinherit her. Bors quickly agrees to become the young lady's champion and fight against the old lady's champion, sir Prydam le Noyre, the following day. Although this episode seems a conventional romance piece that fulfils the criteria of the Round Table Oath's requirement always to protect all women, the second of Bors's visions in this quest shows its spiritual significance.

Bors, as he sleeps on the floor having refused a comfortable bed, sees two birds. One bird is described as white as a swan, the other bird is described as marvellously black as a raven (957.36-958.2). Both birds ask Bors to give them his allegiance and, following conventional symbolism, Bors should agreed to follow the white bird. However, Bors refuses to give his allegiance to the white bird, who promises him all the riches of the world and the beauty and the supposed whiteness of the swan (958.5). The spiritual significance of Bors's decision is clear when this is read against the temptations of Christ in Luke 4: 5-6 when the devil offers Christ authority over all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>212</sup> In this context the bird acts as an agent of Arthurian chivalry and Bors must refuse these worldly rewards. He has no choice but to give his allegiance to the black bird who simply says that he would be much better off to follow him rather than the white bird (958.9-11). Later the abbot who explains all the events of Bors's Grail journey reiterates this point. Bors will discover that the young lady's lord, King Anyaws, was a representation of Christ and the young lady represents the new law of Christ and the church (967.14-90). Her adversary, the old lady was the old law which took delight in warring against the church. These figures, of the young lady and the old lady, are the images of the black and white bird. The young lady is the black bird because, unlike the

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<sup>212</sup> See Luke 4:5-6, 'et duxit illum diabolus et ostendit illi omnia regna orbis terrae in momento temporis et ait ei tibi dabo potestatem hanc universiam et gloriam illorum quia mihi tradita sunt et cui volo do illa'. In the English, 'and the Devil led him into a high mountain, and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And he said to him: To thee will I give all the power, and all the glory of them; for to me they are delivered, and to whom I will, I give them'.

white bird, although she is black on the outside she is white on the inside, because she is a pure follower of Christ and the church. The old lady is black on the inside and is therefore filled with sin and hypocrisy but her outward appearance of white deceives others and leads them into sin (967.25-31).

Bors's choice to defend the young lady is based upon his desire to return the land to correct forms of Christian living rather than for any personal rewards he may receive. This is emphasized when Malory tells us that the young lady would have given him many gifts but Bors refused them (960.12-15). He has put the concerns of the community above his personal concerns and he shows his understanding of this spiritual value of the battle he will fight the following day when he describes it as 'Goddis quarelle and youres' (957.29). The allusion to Christ's temptation in the desert highlights Bors's desire to follow Christ's example in all matters. Bors fights and defeats sir Prydam le Noyre and goads him into surrendering with 'many sadde strokes with the flatte of hys swerde uppon the visayge' (959.34-35) and then returns the land to young lady who can restore the correct customs of the Christian faith.<sup>213</sup> In terms of St Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, in this episode Bors has proven his worth as a knight of Christ.

Having shown that he can correctly identify a cause that complies with the Christian way of life, Bors's next trial will require that he follow the ideals of spiritual chivalry which demands that he abandons a member of his family, in this case his brother Lionel, to possible death in order to save a maiden from rape. He is asked to prove that he can place his concern for his own salvation above his love for his own family. Another vision, set in a chapel, helps Bors to resolve this dilemma. Bors sees a chair and on its left a feeble and worm-eaten tree and on its right two lilies that lean toward and almost touch each

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<sup>213</sup> Stuhmiller argues that this battle is not won by the judgment of God because Bors does not pray before bed or hold a sleepless vigil. What should be noted is that Bors is currently performing a penance and, in doing so, he has refused the luxurious food and the comfortable bed. Furthermore, while asleep on the floor of his bed chamber he is directed by his vision to champion the young lady, representing Christ against the Old Lady, representing the Old Law. Therefore Bors is certainly protecting the interests of Christ when he takes the battle against Sir Prydam le Noyre. See Jacqueline Stuhmiller, '*Judicium Dei, Iudicium Fortunae*: Trial by Combat in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*', *Speculum* 81 (2006), 427-462.

other. A good man appears and separates the lilies because any contact between the two would lead to the loss of their whiteness and, because when they are separated, both lilies produce much fruit (958.12-21). The moral of this vision is explained to Bors when he believes the old man says to him that it would be folly to go against nature by propping up this old and rotten tree while allowing the two white lilies to die (958.22-24).<sup>214</sup>

The tree in this vision comes to represent Lionel whom Bors meets on a fork in a road lying naked, bound and wounded on a small saddle horse. The vision of Lionel is designed to pull at the heartstrings of Bors because of his silent suffering. Lionel is described thus:

[He] suffrid all that they ded to hym as thoughe he had felte none anywysch (960.29-31). But before Bors can rescue his brother he sees a young gentlewoman carried by a knight into the thickest part of the forest which reminds Bors of his Oath as a member of the Round Table to help all women. Bors is faced with an agonizing dilemma: he must choose either to save his brother's life or to save a gentlewoman from the loss of her virtue. He turns to his vision for the answer. Lionel is the feeble and worm-eaten tree because he is spiritually bankrupt and he has nothing to offer the world. Bors, who intrinsically understands his brother's spiritual bankruptcy, prays to Christ to keep Lionel from death as he saves the gentlewoman from her knight abductor.

This episode is crucial in discerning the justification of violence in the *Sangreal*. If the decision to commit a violent act must be made on the basis of its positive effect on the community, according to the ideals of spiritual chivalry, Bors's decision to abandon his brother, leaving him to face possible death in order to prevent the rape of the gentlewoman, is correct. Two interpretations of this episode are given. First, the gentlewoman explains the outcome in the physical or worldly sphere. Second, the abbot explains the outcome in the spiritual sphere later in the chapter. The gentlewoman

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<sup>214</sup> The significance of the feeble old tree unable to bear fruit is explicit when it is read against Matthew 3:10, 'iam enim securus ad radicem arborum posita est. omnis ergo arbor quae non facit fructum bonum exciditur et in ignem mittitur'. In the English, 'for now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire'.

explains that if Bors had abandoned her to rape ‘fyve hondred men sholde have dyed’ (962.8-9). There would have been a war between two branches of the one family because the knight abductor was her cousin, but this civil tumult has been avoided because Bors made the correct decision when confronted with a violent situation. Furthermore, the gentlewoman recognizes that her cousin’s actions were the result of devilish influences because before this incident the family trusted him (962.12-15). In the physical and material sphere, a great civil war was avoided. The abbot explains to Bors that the gentlewoman and the knight abductor were the two lilies of his vision showing that they were both virgins. If they both had lost their virginity, both would have been damned (968.19-20). Therefore, in a spiritual sphere, Bors has saved two souls from damnation. As the abbot tells Bors, because he made this correct decision based on the ideals of spiritual chivalry, and ignoring his own emotional ties to his brother, Bors can now be called ‘a verry knight and the servaunte of Jesu Cryste’ (968.21-22).

Bors must now undergo further challenges to prove he can leave behind his allegiance to his family and the worldly rewards of courtly life as he races off to discover the fate of his brother Lionel. Bors enters a new place in which devilish forces hold sway as they attempt to deceive Bors into forgetting the spiritual ideals of chivalry. The first signal that not all is what it seems in this new place comes when Bors encounters a man dressed in a religious habit who is riding on a horse as black as a berry (962.28-29). This man is a false priest who attempts to deceive Bors into believing that his brother Lionel is dead, by convincing Bors that his absolute trust in Christ is misplaced. Bors does fall into despair, a cardinal sin, when he sees what he believes is the body of his dead brother but again immediately demonstrates his spiritual stability by recognizing that his master (Christ) will be his comfort at this time (963.5-6). The priest takes Bors and Lionel’s body to a place that is spiritually bereft because it has a tower described as fair and a chapel described as old and feeble (963.13-14). This is a place that privileges the secular, denoted by the fair tower, over the spiritual, denoted by the old and feeble chapel. The dangers of the court are explicitly shown here because it is their seductive power that draws the knights away from their spiritual responsibilities. Bors must show that he can hold to the spiritual path within this seductive world.

Having apparently buried Lionel in this chapel, the false priest attempts to lead Bors into sin, when he gives a false interpretation of the vision of the white bird. This white bird, he says, represents a lady who loves Bors passionately and will die if Bors does not take pity on her and return her love in the physical sense. The false priest argues that to refuse this love is vainglorious because Bors wants worldly renown for his chastity. His is not a true spiritual desire for chastity but a worldly desire for fame. The false priest continues to goad Bors into sin by telling him that if he does not submit to this lady Lancelot will die and Bors will have both the death of Lancelot and of Lionel on his conscience (963.27-964.9). Bors admits that leaving Lancelot to die to maintain his own chastity is something he is loath to do. The next temptation begins when the false priest leads Bors into the fair tower and he enters into the realm of the court. The luxuries of the court are so comforting that Bors forgets the anguish he felt for his brother and Lancelot. Here he is introduced to his next opponent in his battle against temptation. This is a courtly lady who is more beautiful than Guinever as well as the richest lady in the world. Furthermore, the man she loves more than any other is, of course, Bors (964.31).

The meaning of the white bird vision becomes clear in this courtly realm. This fair tower with its old and feeble chapel is a representation of the desert where Christ encounters and defeats the temptations of the devil (Luke 4: 5-6). In the *Sangreal* the desert is not the dry and seemingly lifeless place of modern geography, but a place without God. The fact that it is imagined in this book of the *Morte Darthur* as an elaborate and rich court, filled with the earthly comforts of physical pleasures such as sexually willing woman, shows how far the life of Arthur's court has distanced itself from the spiritual ideals of the Grail. In this comfortable and luxurious existence, as they indulge their senses and bodies, the knights of the Round Table easily forget the spiritual principles that should underlie their knightly practice. To survive this challenge and remain a knight of Christ, Bors must prove that he can resist the temptations of this courtly world following the example of Christ in the desert. Bors, who of course is famed for his spiritual stability, does not forget that his primary allegiance is to Christ and he refuses the lady even when she and the other women in the castle threaten to commit suicide.

Even though the woman asks for mercy for all those in the tower, Bors does not change his mind, because he has read the symbolic landscape correctly. He knows it is more important his own soul be saved by not sacrificing his chastity because the women in the tower are living a life which demonstrates they have already lost their own souls (966.4-5). Bors shows his devotion to Christ by crossing himself and the women jump from the battlements making 'a grete Noyre and a grete cry as all the fyndys of helle' had surrounded him (966.9-10). The illusion is broken, the tower, the chapel, and all the ladies disappear as Bors thanks God for his escape (966.13-14). Bors has returned from the desert as he comes to the abbey where a true priest, the abbot, can interpret his adventures. He learns that his last adventure was an attempt by the devil, in the guise of the false priest, to lead him into such despair over the death of his brother that he would fall into the temptation at the fair tower and fail in his quest for the Grail. Furthermore, the abbot assures him Lionel is still alive but reminds him that the old and worm eaten tree represents Lionel because he has transgressed the order of knighthood by committing murder (968.11-12).

Bors has seen, in no uncertain terms, the inherent problems and results of maintaining his allegiance to his family. Also, in these adventures he has been shown the dangers of the court. In both situations Bors witnesses how easily he might have lost his soul if he had allowed the emotional ties to his family and his physical desire for sex to overcome his commitment to God. Another important distinction has been made during in these adventures. If Bors had chosen to save his brother rather than the gentlewoman and her knight abductor, he would have placed his own needs and desires above the needs of the surrounding community. A civil war would have broken the peace of the ruling family and the entire community would have suffered. The danger of violence waged for private and individual gain is shown in this episode. If Bors had submitted to the temptation of the lady of the castle, not only would he have lost the opportunity and the resulting rewards of joining the exclusive fellowship of the Grail, he would have been so preoccupied by the pleasures and luxuries of courtly life that he could no longer have performed knightly deeds to benefit the community. In short, a knight of great prowess

who understands the ideals of spiritual chivalry would have been lost to the world. By refusing to be seduced by the pleasures of the court, Bors has demonstrated that he can return to the Arthurian court and not forget the spiritual lessons of the Grail quest.

### **Bors's Lesson in Self-Sacrifice**

Bors's adventures in the wilderness landscape of the Grail quest are not over yet. He must now meet his brother and face his wrath because Bors abandoned him. This episode depicts how Bors's desire for fellowship with his brother and other members of the Round Table leads him away from the ideals of spiritual chivalry as he hopes to meet and join them at a great tournament (968.37-969.1). Bors finds Lionel unarmed and sitting in the door of a chapel in a forest. Lionel's expression of anger towards Bors demonstrates the ideological gulf between the two brothers as he castigates Bors for leaving him to die and rescuing the gentlewoman and her knight abductor (969.11-15). Lionel shows he is indeed a murderer when he demands Bors leave him and threatens that if they meet when Lionel is armed he will kill him (969.15-19). Bors falls to ground and begs to be forgiven. In this instance Lionel's distance from the Pentecostal Oath of the Round Table is explicit. First, against the tenets of the Oath, he has threatened murder, and second, he has maintained this threat even when the knight has asked for mercy. He, as the abbot said, has shown he is not a true member of the order of knighthood. Furthermore Lionel damns himself when he vows to God he will kill Bors (969.25-26). Having now threatened to kill his brother by an oath sworn upon God, he justifies his threat of violence by accusing Bors of being 'the untrewest knight that ever cam oute of so worthy an house as was kyng Bors de Ganis, which was oure fadir' (969.30-32). It becomes clear that Bors cannot maintain his allegiance to his family as well as maintaining his allegiance to God. If he maintained his allegiance to his family he could not have saved the gentlewoman and her knight abductor, and both their souls would have been damned and the surrounding area engulfed in civil war. Following this code of chivalry he would have wasted his energy on saving his brother, who did survive the attack, doubtless because of Bors's prayer placing him in Christ's safe-keeping. Bors's only hope of surviving this final challenge is to forget his family ties and place all his allegiance in

Christ and the ideals of spiritual chivalry. Bors will be asked to prove that he is willing to die rather than break with the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

To prevent their fighting each other, Bors's only choice is to appeal to his brother's sense of mercy, by attempting to evoke the memory of the brotherly love they have felt towards each other. He falls to his knees before Lionel's horse to make his appeal. This measured response to his brother's threat is because Lionel is Bors's older brother and Bors owes him reverence. This prevents him from considering fighting with his brother because just as Lionel has called upon their family relationship to justify his threat to kill Bors, Bors pleads for his life in memory of the love they have shared as brothers (970.10-12). But Lionel has been overtaken by evil because a 'fiend' has possessed Lionel (970.14). Lionel cannot respond to the memory of the love they have shared as brothers. He has become the embodiment of the dried up tree in Bors's earlier vision and wishes to destroy the one person still able to show him love, because he believes his brother has betrayed his family's reputation. This reputation becomes more important to him than his feelings for his brother. As Bors passively awaits his brother's attack, his true vocation as a soldier of Christ becomes explicit: not only is Bors called upon to bring the ideals of the Grail back to the court of Arthur, he shows his willingness to become a martyr. This episode can be read as a sign of his future life in the Holy Land at the end of the *Morte Darthur* when he dies with the remaining knights on Good Friday. Bors's true role in the Grail quest is to prove he is willing to die for Christ.

But it is not Bors who will suffer death now. Lionel shows the true extent of the fiend's evil by killing a holy man and another knight of the Round Table who comes to Bors's assistance. What this episode also demonstrates is that no worldly action can overcome this evil; it can only be defeated by direct intervention by spiritual powers. In the first instance, a holy man who, like Bors, appeals to Lionel's mercy champions Bors. He asks Lionel to save both their lives and importantly reminds him that, if Lionel does kill them both, he will be damning himself. This will be an especially grievous sin because Bors is:

One of the worthyest knyghtes of the worlde and of beste condicions (970.29-30).

Lionel does not back away from his position and kills the holy man, but not until after the holy man has quietly accepted that his death will follow, saying he is prepared to die to save Bors because the loss of Bors would be harmful to the world (971.1-2). This does not soothe Lionel's anger as he removes Bors's helmet, ready to strike the death blow, when sir Colledgevaunce comes forward to restrain Lionel and convince him by reason that he should not kill his brother because Bors is one of the worthiest knights in the world (971.18-9). But Colledgevaunce suffers the same fate as the holy man as Lionel continues on his destructive course inspired by the evil that has possessed him.

The death of both the holy man and sir Colledgevaunce at the hand of Lionel emphasizes the importance of the Grail's ideals of spiritual chivalry. Here Bors must be saved because he is destined to complete the Grail quest and bring these new ideals to promote peace and harmony throughout the Arthurian world. Bors represents the hope for the preservation of the Arthurian civilization if he can complete the quest, learn the final spiritual truth of the Grail, and bring these Grail ideals back to the court of Arthur. It is far more important that he continues to live, and both the holy man and Colledgevaunce realize that they must die in order that the gifts of the Grail may be given to the world. Nevertheless, the evil spirit that has possessed Lionel still insists on killing his brother and Bors finally succumbs to the reality that he must use his sword against his brother to save his own life.

Bors has come to his final test. He is given two paths to follow. First, he can use his knightly skill and prowess to defeat and possibly kill his brother whose actions have proved that he is, indeed, a murderer. Or, second, he can pray to God that they are removed from this battle. If Bors follows the first path he knows he is placing his soul in jeopardy and he will die in a state of sin (973.19-20). But if God miraculously removes Bors and Lionel from this battle each would have the opportunity to atone for his sins. The miracle does occur; a cloud like a flame separates the knights and Bors can beg and receive forgiveness from his brother and from God (974.16-17). What Bors has shown is that he can make decisions on the basis of what is best for the community even if this decision involves abandoning his own family ties. Bors, at the behest of an unidentified

voice, leaves his brother and travels to meet Perceval in the ship covered with white samite (974.25-27). Perceval and Bors exchange the stories of their adventures as they await the arrival of Galahad and their journey to see the final spiritual truth of the Grail.

The tale of Bors in Malory's *Sangreal* comes to an end. He is no longer the individual knight proving his worth to join the exclusive Grail fellowship in the wilderness landscape of the Grail quest. He has shown throughout this time of trial that he can make decisions about the use of violence that are based on the ideals of spiritual chivalry, even when these decisions adversely affect the fortunes of his family. One of the most interesting aspects of his character throughout the entire *Morte Darthur* and in critical discourse, his relationship with Lancelot, is not tested in this journey through the wilderness. This brings the reader back to the critical debate discussed at the beginning of the chapter: does Bors's exemplary performance in the Grail landscape shape his entire character throughout the *Morte Darthur*, or is his reputation for spiritual stability belied by the fact that he does not truly abandon his worldly and emotional ties with Lancelot? The final question must consider whether or not Bors does abandon the ideals of spiritual chivalry in the last two books of the *Morte Darthur*, thereby contributing to the destruction of Arthurian civilization. However, after the final destruction of Arthurian civilization, Bors is the knight who takes these difficult otherworldly ideals of the Grail into the real world and leads the remaining knights of the Round Table to the Holy Land where, by dying on Good Friday as a martyr to the ideals of spiritual chivalry, he honours the memory of the holy man and of Colledgevaunce who both martyred themselves to save his life.

Having examined the two types of knights of Christ described by Bernard, the one who fights spiritual forces and the one who fights material enemies, the thesis turns to the example of the knight who fights both, Galahad. He is the *Sangreal's* example of knightly perfection.

## Chapter Four

### Sir Galahad: The Haute Knight

Therefore, Malory must treat Galahad, not as a regular knight of the Round Table, but as a heavenly knight, sent to Arthur to accomplish only this one mission, and, by example, reveal the inadequacies of the other knights and of the secular civilization that they represent.<sup>215</sup>

#### Introduction

Commentators dismiss Galahad as boring,<sup>216</sup> after all he is the ideal example of the spiritual knight whose service to Christ never falters.<sup>217</sup> He does not have the human dilemmas that make the other knights interesting as they struggle against their physical and material appetites on the Grail quest. Nor can his attitudes be explained by the internal struggles of conscience seen in the portraits of Lancelot, Bors and Perceval as they fight against the various types of evil symbolized by their contact with devilish forces.<sup>218</sup> But this misses the whole aim of his inclusion in Malory's *Sangreal* because, if the Grail is interpreted as a set of ideals, Galahad is their embodiment. Although this view may reduce Galahad from being a character to being an ideology, it is his personification of this ideology that makes Galahad interesting.<sup>219</sup> Without an understanding of Galahad, it is impossible to grasp exactly how violence is justified in

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<sup>215</sup> Charles Moorman, 'Malory's Treatment of the Sankgreall', *PMLA* 71, (1956), 504.

<sup>216</sup> Falcetta, 'The Enduring Sacred Strain: The Place of the *Tale of the Sankgreall* within Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*', 28. Moorman describes Galahad as dehumanized. See Moorman, 'Malory's Treatment of the *Sankgreall*', 504.

<sup>217</sup> Galahad is the epitome of the spiritual knighthood according to Radulescu, 'Now I Take Uppon Me the Adventures to Seke of Holy Things: Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood', 286.

<sup>218</sup> As Jill Mann says Galahad's worth is manifested in the fact that he cannot be tempted and that his pre-eminence in the Grail quest exists in this wholeness. See Mann, 'Malory and the Grail Legend', 210.

<sup>219</sup> Stephen Knight sees Galahad's introduction into the Grail Legend in the *Queste del Sainte Graal* as that of a 'Christ-like' character. See Knight, 'From Jerusalem to Camelot: King Arthur and the Crusades', 230-232. I would argue that this characterization remains true in Malory's *Sangreal* as Galahad is set up as an idealized representative of spiritual chivalry.

Christian ideals in direct opposition to the knightly practices found in the court of Arthur.<sup>220</sup>

Galahad is like the knight in Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood* who girds his soul with the armour of faith and protects his body with the armour of steel. He fights both a physical enemy who threatens to remove communities from their Christian values as well as demonic forces that threaten them.<sup>221</sup> He is the knight who, and this is a controversial matter in the critical debate, has given rise to speculation that the Knights of the Grail are fictitious examples of the military orders. Bernard championed these orders of 'fighting monks', such as the Knights Templar, when he wrote *In Praise of the New Knighthood* in 1135 as an open letter in support of the Templars in the Holy Land. This strand of criticism has existed around the Grail legend since the late nineteenth century when Alfred Nutt first connected the Grail legend with the spirit of the crusades.<sup>222</sup> However, as Helen Nicholson notes, it is creative writers who assume a connection to the Templars in their modern retellings of the Grail legend. Scholars cannot trace this association to any medieval source.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, this thesis does not turn to history to explore any tenuous connections to the military orders, but looks to the text to discover how Galahad is represented in Malory's *Sangreal*. I argue that this textual exploration reveals that he is a knight dedicated to the principles of Christian chivalry, who, as such, operates in direct opposition to Arthurian chivalry.

Galahad entered literature in Malory's direct source, the thirteenth-century *Queste del Sainte Graal*, displacing the spiritually flawed Perceval as the premier Grail knight. Martin B. Shichtman argues that there are connections in the *Queste* to the military orders

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<sup>220</sup> Robert L. Kelly, 'Arthur, Galahad and the Scriptural Pattern in Malory', *American Benedictine Review* 23 (1972), 9-23, 18. Kelly argues that Galahad acts with violence with just cause as it is defined in the Pentecostal Oath of the Round Table. Therefore he never commits 'outrage nothir murder' or becomes involved in 'batayles in a wrongfull quarell.' Arthur, on the other hand, has frequently violated the oath.

<sup>221</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 129-130.

<sup>222</sup> Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail with Especial Reference to the Hypothesis of Its Celtic Origin*, 236.

<sup>223</sup> Helen J. Nicholson, *Love, War and the Grail: Templars, Hospitallers and the Teutonic Knights in Medieval Epic and Romance 1150-1500* (Boston, MA and Leiden: Brill, 2004), 102.

and Bernard's vision of knighthood. Shichtman continues a thread of commentary that has existed since Albert Pauphilet first suggested that Cistercian theology influenced the *Queste*, Shichtman examines the text from a religious and spiritual point of view. He argues that, unless the social and political implications of this influence are examined, the purpose of the text cannot be fully appreciated because the *Queste* attempts to mediate the increasing tensions between the church and the knightly classes in the early thirteenth century. It is a discourse of religious certainty that positions knights and clerics in a manner that allows the continued exchange of symbolic and material capital between the two groups. Because there is an assumption of a peaceful and philosophic connection between these two groups, there is an expectation that the spiritual form of chivalry will win out over the worldly form of chivalry. This has implications for Galahad, who in the *Queste* is portrayed as a 'paradigmatic Christ-like figure' but a figure, nevertheless, who is not granted omniscience. He still requires explanations to read the signs correctly when making decisions about the use of his knightly skills when there is a direct threat of violence.<sup>224</sup>

When Malory was writing his version, based on the *Queste*, of the Grail legend in the fifteenth century, the religious certainties of the thirteenth century had been replaced by an unstable political situation in England. Neither the church nor other knights could teach Galahad how to be a spiritual knight. Malory portrays him as a knight who requires no guidance; he is a knight who instinctively knows the proper spiritual response to the threat of violence.<sup>225</sup> His portrayal in the *Sangreal* is very different from that of Bors and Perceval. In the Grail quest, the other two members of the Grail fellowship are learning a new way of being a knight. Their individual challenges are constructed as tests that allow them to learn the concepts of spiritual chivalry. However, Galahad has no need to be taught because his role is to demonstrate the concepts of spiritual chivalry. He becomes a

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<sup>224</sup> Martin B. Shichtman, 'Politicizing the Ineffable: The *Queste Del Saint Graal* and Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal'', in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 163-179, 163-174. The symbolic capital of the text is the church's view that knights exist for the church and the material capital is the wealth the church receives from the knightly classes in the form of endowments and gifts to the church.

<sup>225</sup> Shichtman, 'Politicizing the Ineffable', 163-174.

teacher rather than a student of the new order that has descended upon the Arthurian world. He is the standard to which the other knights of the Grail quest must aspire if the collapse of the Arthurian civilization is to be avoided.<sup>226</sup> The tragedy of the Grail in Malory's *Morte Darthur* is that Galahad's influence does not live on at the court of Arthur. The entire civilization is destroyed by internal dissension as the knights fight each other for worldly honour and privilege at the court rather than follow the new ideals that Galahad has shown them in the Grail quest.

To discover how Galahad represents the ideology of the correct use of violence in the *Tale of the Sangreal*, his story will be examined in detail. His first appearance in the *Morte Darthur* is in *Launcelot and Elaine* in *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*, where the spiritual potential of many knights is assessed. There are decided differences between discussion of the spiritual potential of Perceval and Bors, which is not certain at this stage of the text, and discussion of the spiritual potential of Galahad because his success is certain. *Launcelot and Elaine* opens with the arrival of a hermit at the court of Arthur on Whitsunday or, as it is expressed in the *Sangreal*, Pentecost, and announces that the knight who will occupy the Sege Perillous at the Round Table is 'yet unborne and unbegotyn, and this same yere he shall be bygotyn that shall sytte in that Syege Perelous, and he shall wynne the Sankgreall' (791.18-21).<sup>227</sup> Before he is conceived, Galahad is announced as the destined paragon of spiritual chivalry who will attain the greatest honour in the highest adventure of the *Morte Darthur*.

The date of this announcement is significant. Pentecost celebrates the beginning of the Christian church when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles (Acts 2: 2-4). The parallel with the biblical story emphasize that Galahad's birth ushers in a new order of chivalry as his destined purpose echoes Peter's exhortation to the crowd who witness the apostles speaking in tongues:

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<sup>226</sup> Felicia Nimue Ackerman, 'I May Do No Penance: Spiritual Sloth in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana* 16, (2006), 47-53, 48.

<sup>227</sup> The references to Pentecost and to the Sege Perillous highlight how the Grail episodes in the *Book of Tristram* are closely linked to the *Sangreal* because both these references foreshadow the spiritual signs that accompany Galahad's arrival at Arthur's court.

‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2: 38-9).<sup>228</sup>

The knights of the Round Table have been commanded to abandon their old notions of chivalry and allegiance to the king, and follow a new order of chivalry and place their allegiance in Christ. The spiritual failure of Arthurian chivalry is suggested because, at Pentecost, Arthur was proclaimed king after he miraculously removed the sword from the stone (16.7-10). Galahad will also remove a sword from a stone at Pentecost in the *Departure* (862.33-35) and become a king in Sarras (1034.4-5). Galahad is not just the knight by whose standards Arthurian chivalry will be judged,<sup>229</sup> he also represents a new type of kingship, one that has rejected the ideals of Arthur and his Round Table.

### **Galahad’s Conception and Birth**

The problems of Arthurian chivalry are brought sharply into focus when the circumstances of Galahad’s conception are examined. This conception must be accomplished by deception and enchantment. Although he is the destined Grail knight prophesied by a hermit on a religious feastday, his worth as a knight to the court of Arthur is also dependent on his earthly bloodline which, as Guinevere reminds the court in the opening chapter of the *Sangreal*, is of the best knights and highest lineage (865.8-9). As Lancelot’s son, Galahad is descended by the ninth degree from Christ himself (865.9-11). He has familial connections to the Grail also because his mother is the daughter of King Pelles of the Grail castle, Elaine. Galahad’s bloodline has the highest spiritual pedigree available within the Arthurian world. But this predestined match between Lancelot and Elaine is threatened by Lancelot’s adulterous love for Guinevere. Galahad’s birth can only be achieved when Elaine’s nurse tricks Lancelot into believing that Guinevere was waiting for him at a nearby castle (794.21-795.16). Galahad achieves

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<sup>228</sup> In the Latin, ‘Paenitentiam inquit agite et baptizetur unusquisque vestrum in nomine Iesu Christi in remissionem peccatorum vestrorum et accipietis donum Sancti Spiritus Vobis enim est repromissio et filiis vestris et omnibus qui longe sunt quoscumque advocaverit Dominus Deus noster’.

<sup>229</sup> Mann, ‘Malory and the Grail Legend’, 207.

a flawless spiritual pedigree despite being born amid confusion and trickery. Galahad spends his childhood in the confined spaces of the church preparing for the Grail quest that will begin when he arrives at Arthur's court.

### **Galahad's Introduction to the Arthurian Court**

Galahad's introduction to the court of Arthur in the *Departure* during the annual feast of Pentecost is an event wrapped in mystery as it signals the coming of a new order of chivalry. His arrival is far removed from the usual introduction a young man receives at Arthur's court when accompanied by a member of his family. The king confers knighthood once his correct aristocratic background is established.

Galahad's introduction differs in the following ways. First, it occurs away from the court denoting the emerging opposition between the worldly court of Arthur and the spiritual court of Pelles' Grail castle. A gentlewoman who identifies herself only as a member of King Pelles's household leads Lancelot to a nunnery. Guinevere demonstrates this opposition by protesting that Lancelot is leaving Arthur's court the night before the feast of Pentecost when all the knights of the Round Table gather to renew their oath and allegiance to Arthur. Lancelot's affiliation with Arthur's court, however, is confirmed by the gentlewoman's promise that he will return before the commencement of the feast the following day (853.23-25). Second, Galahad has not had the formal chivalric training that other knights of the Round Table have received. He has not been brought up in the world of the court but in the world of the church and he is introduced to his father, Lancelot, in the company of twelve nuns. Nonetheless, his pre-eminence is emphasized when he is described as 'passynge fayre and welle made, that unneth in the world men myght nat fynde hys macche' (854.11-12). Lancelot's assessment of Galahad's appearance prepares the reader for his role in the *Sangreal*. He is described as being as 'demure as a dove' (854.19). When this description is read against Matthew 3:16, Galahad's role becomes obvious:

And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to him: and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon

him.<sup>230</sup>

The introduction of Galahad into the *Morte Darthur* is as a young man surrounded by spiritual symbols, residing in a religious house, he is striking in appearance and with the demeanor of a man of peace. It is no wonder that Lancelot asks whether it is Galahad's own decision to become a knight (854.22-23). What all these signs demonstrate is that Galahad has very different values to those values found at Arthur's court, and this suggests that a new spiritual order of knighthood is coming to the Arthurian civilization. A further parallel with the first Pentecost described in Acts is the apostles' rejection of the old order when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Galahad, likewise, rejects the Arthurian court.<sup>231</sup> His refusal to come to the court with Lancelot to celebrate the Pentecostal Feast shows that he will not give his allegiance to Arthur.<sup>232</sup>

The court is prepared for the coming of this new knight who will usher in the new order of spiritual chivalry by a series of events that seem pre-ordained and that heighten the spiritual intensity of this particular moment. One of the first signs is the appearance of gold lettering, designating where each knight should sit at the feast of Pentecost. When the knights come to the mysterious Sege Perillous, where only Galahad may sit, attention

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<sup>230</sup> In the Latin, 'Baptizatus autem confessim ascendit de aqua et ecce aperti sunt ei caeli et vidit Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam venientem super se'.

<sup>231</sup> Acts 2:42-7 describes the practices of those who follow the message of Peter, describing how they left behind a secular life for a life devoted to spiritual practices. In the Latin, 'errant autem perseverantes in doctrina apostolorum et communicatione fractionis panis et orationibus fiebat autem omni animae timor multa quoque prodigia et signa per apostolos fiebant in Hierusalem et metus erat magnus in universis omnes etiam qui credebant errant pariter et habebant omnia communia possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus est cotidie quoque perdurantes unanimitate in templo et frangentes circa domos panem sumebat cibum cum exultatione et simplicitate cordis conlaudantes Deum et habentes gratiam ad omnem plebem Dominus autem augebat qui salvi ferent cotidie in id ipsum'. In the English, 'And they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of breaking the bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: many wonders also and signs were done by the apostles in Jerusalem, and there was great fear in all. And all that believed, were together, and had all things common. Their possessions and goods they sold, and divided to all according as everyone had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart; Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord increased daily together such as should be saved'.

<sup>232</sup> Michelle R. Wright, 'Designing the End of History in the Arming of Galahad', *Arthuriana* 5, (1995), 45-55, 46.

is drawn to the spiritual significance of the event as this seat is associated with the crucifixion:

FOURE HONDRED WYNTER AND FOURE AND FYFFTY AFTIR THE PASSION  
OF OURE LORDE JESU CHRYST OUGHTE THYS SYEGE TO BE FULFYLLED  
(855.12-4).

Because Lancelot understands that no current knight of the Round Table is destined to take the seat, he asks that the letters be covered (855.23-24).

This lack of spiritual understanding in the knights of the Round Table is demonstrated when various knights are tested in the episode of the sword in the red marble stone. The testing, before the knights have even left the security and comfort of the worldly court of Arthur, shows in a peculiarly individual manner how this lack of understanding manifests within the knights and can be contrasted against Galahad's precise understanding of the spiritual chivalry. All the other knights fail until Galahad removes the sword and establishes his spiritual, rather than worldly, allegiance because he has received his sword by a miracle, rather than the hand of a man.<sup>233</sup> Galahad shows that he is the model that all must follow to achieve the Grail quest.

Galahad's arrival is surrounded by mystery and symbolism highlighting the change in authority from the worldly Arthur to the spiritual Grail. As the knights return to the feast and take their designated seats at the table, leaving only the Sege Perillous empty, another 'mervaylous adventure' occurs (858.12). Describing the event as marvellous denotes its supernatural nature. Describing the event in the more spiritual terminology of the miraculous tells the reader that the court has not yet fully grasped the entire meaning of Galahad's arrival. The reader must wait until the knights have left Camelot and are searching for the Grail in the wilderness landscape of the quest before this particular term is used to describe the activities of Galahad.

The supernatural significance of this event is seen when Galahad's arrival, in the company of an old man dressed in white, is announced as all the doors and windows of

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<sup>233</sup> Wright, 'Designing the End of History', 46.

the hall shut by themselves (858.4-14).<sup>234</sup> Richard Kaeuper argues that medieval Christians would recognize the parallel between this scene and Christ's entrance into the upper room after his resurrection. Although Kaeuper's observation is based on his reading of the *Queste*, the comments are just as relevant to Malory's *Sangreal*. When this scene is read against John 20: 19-22, Galahad's appearance at Camelot corresponds again with the coming of a new spiritual order of chivalry:

Now when it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace be to you. And when he had said this, he shewed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord. He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost.<sup>235</sup>

By likening the appearance of Galahad to Christ's appearance to his disciples in the upper room and the giving of the Holy Spirit, this reference becomes another sign of the dawning of a new age of chivalry. St John Chrysostom interprets Christ's appearance with the disciples as another Pentecost because they receive the spiritual power and grace to remit sins through the Holy Spirit.<sup>236</sup> In the *Sangreal*, Galahad's arrival at Arthur's court is a chance to rectify all the damage done to the kingdom by the knights' pursuit of violence for their own glory and profit. Arthur's misreading of these events as marvels, which he interprets in terms of the glory gained by his court, shows his estrangement from spiritual ideals. (859.1-3). He does not see Galahad's arrival at the court as the advent of a new ideal of spiritual chivalry. Arthur's misreading of the situation is reinforced further by the ambiguity of the imagery associated with both Galahad and the old man. The old man's clothing suggests that he belongs to a religious order but he is

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<sup>234</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 56. I would like to thank Professor Kaeuper for pointing out the significance of John 20:19-22 at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, July 2007.

<sup>235</sup> In the Latin, 'cum esset ergo sero die illo una sabbatorum et fores essent clausae ubi erant discipuli propter metum Iudaeorum venit Iesus et stetit in medio et dicit eis pax vobis hoc cum dixisset ostendit eis manus et latus Gavisi sunt ergo discipuli viso Domino dixit ergo eis iterum pax vobis sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos hoc cum dixisset insuflavit et dicit eis accipite Spiritum Sanctum'.

<sup>236</sup> Veselin Kesich, *The First Day of Creation, The Resurrection and the Christian Faith* (New York, NY, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 168.

identified later as a knight of the court of King Pelles, the guardian of the Grail (861.1-3). This association highlights the spiritual significance of these events because the Grail court represents the spiritual ideals that are to be introduced to the worldly Arthurian court.

The blurring of the imagery surrounding the old man is found in the description of Galahad when he is introduced to the court. Galahad wears red armour and a scabbard but he does not carry a sword or a shield and arrives on foot without a horse (859.7-8). He is dressed as a knight but does not carry the usual accompaniments of the knight. Although this signifies that he does not belong to any identifiable court, the missing accompaniments as well as the colour of his armour are keys to his character. First, red is the liturgical colour of Pentecost and represents the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. Second, the lack of arms will be the mechanism by which Galahad will display his affinity with the spiritual ideals of chivalry. Unlike more worldly knights, Galahad will not receive his arms from a worldly sovereign, he will receive his arms by a series of miracles, and the first of these will be the removal of the sword from the red stone. Galahad's allegiance is further distanced from the court of Arthur when the old man announces his lineage. Although he is the son of Lancelot, he is introduced to Arthur's court as being of a king's lineage and as a descendent of Joseph of Arimathea (859.12-3). His kinship with Lancelot and his subsequent affiliation with the Arthurian court have been dismissed in his introduction until Guinevere announces it. What is emphasized is his affiliation with the Grail court through his grandfather, King Pelles, and the spiritual nature of his mission, which has been linked with Christ and his passion by the reference to Joseph of Arimathea who removed the body of Christ from the cross.<sup>237</sup>

Galahad's task is to fulfill the destiny assigned to him before his birth. He takes his place at the Round Table by sitting in the Sege Perillous. This sense of destiny is heightened

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<sup>237</sup> The scriptural foundation of Joseph of Arimathea is found in Luke 23: 50-6 and in John 19: 38-42. For Joseph's association with the Grail legend, see Robert De Boron. 'Joseph of Arimathea' in *Merlin and the Grail, Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Percival, The Trilogy of Prose Romances Attributed to Robert De Boron*, 15-44.

when the cloth covering the original gold letters seen on the Sege is removed and new letters are found which announce Galahad's claim to that particular place at the Round Table:

THYS YS THE SYEGE OF SIR GALAHAD THE HAWTE PRYNCE (960.11).

These mysterious events proclaim Galahad as a member of the Round Table but this honour is conferred upon him by supernatural, rather than worldly, means. The spiritual authority of the Grail court has overridden the worldly authority of Arthur. Galahad sets himself apart from all the other knights of the Round Table when he sits on the Sege Perillous because anyone else who had ever sat upon the seat had been brought to harm (861.12). This sign proclaims that Galahad as the knight destined to succeed in the Grail quest (861.10).

Galahad's function at Arthur's court is shown by an examination of the sword which he receives when he removes it from the red marble stone. This is a sword that has caused great injury. It is the sword Balin had used when he accidentally killed his brother, Balan in Book Two of the *Morte Darthur*, *Balin Le Sauvage or the Knight with Two Swords*. But, more significantly for the *Sangreal*, this sword maimed king Pellam (as Pelles is called in *Balin Le Sauvage*) with the dolorous stroke, devastating the countryside:

So he rode forthe thorow the fayre contreyes and citeys and founde the peple dede slayne on every syde, and all that evir were on lyve cryed and seyde, 'A, Balyn! Thou hast done and caused grete vengeaunce in thys contreyes! For the dolorous stroke thou gaff unto kynge Pellam thes three contreyes ar destroyed (85.32-86.5).

This reference demonstrates how Arthurian chivalry impacted upon the Grail court. Balin, a knight of the court of Arthur, had produced such destruction because he had unthinkingly wounded a man whom Merlin describes as 'the mooste worshipfullist man on lyve in tho dayes' (85.28-29). This sword, which Balin removed from the Grail chamber, produced a spiritual wound in the countryside because it was the sword of Longeus with which, according to legend, he pierced the side of Christ as he hung on the cross (85.26-27).<sup>238</sup> The wound produced by this blow can be seen metaphorically to

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<sup>238</sup> Although the name Longeus does not appear in the Bible, the piecing of Jesus' side when he is on the cross appears in John 19:34. In the Latin, 'sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit et

have alienated the people from God and they will remain in this state until Galahad heals the king following the Grail ceremony and the land is returned to Christian ideals. The removal of the sword from the red marble stone marks the beginning of the land's movement back to these ideals. By retrieving this sword, Galahad's role becomes clear, he will heal those communities who have been forced to move away from Christ by the activities of the knights belonging to Arthur's court.

Arthur recognizes the importance of Galahad's arrival at Camelot by calling all his knights together for a final tournament. This, as Arthur explains, will be the last time that his court will tourney together because the quest of the Sangreal is about to begin and the knights will be scattered throughout the land (864.5-9). Arthur continues to view events from a worldly point of view. He announces that the purpose of this tournament is to provide the knights with a forum where they may increase their honour and glory in the world, so that 'aftir youre dethe men may speke of hit that such good knyghtes were here, such a day, hole togydirs' (864.10-12). In an effort to incorporate him into his court, Galahad is given the opportunity to display his immense prowess against the other knights of the Round Table.<sup>239</sup> Yet Galahad resists the possibility of total immersion into the court because he refuses to take a shield from any knight who is defeated by him (864. 21-24).

Thus a miniature battle evolves. While Arthur attempts to incorporate Galahad into the worldly ideals of chivalry found at Camelot, Galahad continues to maintain his distance so his allegiance to the spiritual ideals of the Grail are not compromised. What Galahad is demonstrating throughout this process of introducing himself to the Arthurian court is his capacity of being an example of Bernard's new knight. He has demonstrated by winning

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continuo exivit sanguis et aqua'. In the English, 'But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water'.

<sup>239</sup> In other books of the *Morte Darthur*, the tournament is an opportunity for the knights of the Round Table to display and celebrate their immense prowess. It is only in the *Sangreal* that the tournament develops another significance, where it becomes a means of challenging the knights to make spiritually wise decisions in a courtly environment. This new significance becomes evident when Lancelot fights in a tournament during his Grail journey because the choices he makes in this episode highlight that he does not understand spiritual ideals of chivalry. See below page 177.

the tournament that he is a knight of the world but his background and his entrance into the court mark him as a knight of the spirit. In fact, he is a knight, who having been conceived in the mostly worldly of circumstances, was removed from the world and grew up in the religious environment of a convent. By sitting in the Sege Perillous as well as removing the sword of Balin from the red marble, he shows that he is able to perform miraculous feats. But he has refused to be immersed into the court by accepting any gifts from the court and from Arthur. Therefore, he is a knight that can fight the spiritual demons, as well as the flesh and blood opponents of the community. He has the capacity to protect the community from both spiritual and material evil.

Galahad's affinity with the Grail is demonstrated when the Grail arrives among a blaze of mysterious events. The significance of Pentecost is emphasized again as the Grail's appearance is described as being by 'the grace of the Holy Goste' (865.21). The doors and windows slam shut but a light appears in the feast hall clearer than any light seen before at the court. It brings to the knights to a new understanding as each sees the others illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit so that all seemed fairer than they had looked before (865.23). In this moment the arguments and feuds of the past are forgotten and the fellowship becomes bathed in the light of spiritual love of one another. The arrival of Galahad and the spiritual ideals of the Grail at Camelot are the advent of peace and harmony. This is to be an intensely healing peace as the sword of Balin, which caused so much devastation in the countries surrounding the Grail castle, is now placed in the hands of Galahad and his absolute allegiance to spiritual ideals.<sup>240</sup>

The appearance of the Grail signifies the worldliness of the court of Arthur. The knights of the Round Table have not yet proved themselves worthy through the trials and temptations of the Grail quest, to see the entire spiritual truth of the Grail. Therefore it comes to Camelot in worldly guise, covered by white samite but it does bring the good things of the world. Each knight is given his favourite food and drink and the hall is filled with sweet fragrance (865.30-31). What the Grail brings is the fruits of peace to feed all

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<sup>240</sup> Jill Mann in 'Malory and the Grail Legend' has also noted that the sword of Balin becomes a sword of healing when it is given to Galahad, 211.

from the abundance of the land just as the dolorous stroke had devastated the land and brought starvation. It is a clear message that the chivalric ideals of the Grail will lead to abundance and peace, whereas continued violence leads to starvation and devastation. There is a sense that the knights understand this spiritual message because, after the Grail departs and they are able to speak again, each gives thanks to God for the grace sent to them that day (865.35-36). However, what each knight may not grasp as he undertakes his Grail journey is that he must conform to a new model of chivalry. To guide them throughout the Grail journey is the example of Galahad whose remarkable entrance into the Arthurian court has introduced a new spiritual mode of being a knight within the world.

### **Galahad's Purpose is Clarified**

Galahad has been defined as an instrument of peace in the Arthurian world and in *The Miracles*, he shows how violence can be used to promote peace if used in accordance with spiritual ideals. The first episode concerning Galahad in this chapter sees him acquiring a shield in an abbey.<sup>241</sup> This adventure confirms that Galahad is a spiritual knight whose great prowess sets him above the knights of the Round Table and that this prowess comes from God. This shield selects its owner, and as it is destined for Galahad, anyone else attempting to take it will be either maimed or killed within three days (878.14). In order to test this claim, Galahad meets two other knights at the abbey, sir Bagdemaghus and sir Uwayne. Even against his better judgment Bagdemus decides to test the shield and the monks remove it from its resting place behind the altar. The prophecy is proved to be true and Bagdemaghus is wounded by a white knight who announces that the shield's true owner is Galahad because he is a knight who follows the ideals of spiritual chivalry (878.21-6).

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<sup>241</sup> This is described as a white abbey, which is one the major tenets of Pauphilet's argument that Malory's source, *The Queste del Sainte Graal*, was inspired by Cistercian influences. In the Old French of the *Queste*, 'Et il rois Bademagus, qui se fu mis en son chemin entre lui et l'escuier, chevaucha bien deus lieues et plus, et tant qu'il vint en vatee par devant un hermitage qui estoit ou fons d'val. Et il resgarde vers l'ermitage et voit de cele part venir un chevalier armé d'unes armes blanches, et venoit si grant oirre come li chevax sor qui il seoit pooit aler (28.31-29.4)'. For a discussion of Pauphilet's argument see Albert Pauphilet, *Études sur la Queste Del Saint Graal attribuée à Gautier Map*, (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré, Édouard Champion, 1924), 55 in French or as cited in English, See Pratt, 'The Cistercians and the Queste Del Saint Graal', 72.

The true nature of the shield is revealed when Galahad meets this white knight. This was the shield given to King Evelake in the city of Sarras, who fighting against his cousin, a Saracen, converted to Christianity under the instruction of Joseph of Arimathea's son, Joseph who becomes bishop of Sarras. On the day of the battle when Evelake faced the greatest danger, the cloth covering the shield was removed and an image of Christ on the cross appeared on the shield and he won the day (879.19-880.8). Again Galahad's function is spelled out: he is to maintain the Christian customs of the people and if he does resort to violence it is to be used to remove evildoers from Christian communities. Another lesson in the history of the shield confirms that it is to be used in the service of God. When Evelake arrives in Britain following his baptism and in the company of Joseph, a pagan rules the land. Joseph is thrown into prison and cannot be released until Evelake with the help of another king, Mondrames, defeats the pagan. After this the people of Britain return to the Christian faith (880.19-30). These events are inscribed on the shield so that it is identified as an object of Christian conversion; the shield is marked with the sign of the cross with Joseph's blood (881.4-6). It remained in the abbey until the arrival of Galahad whose allegiance to spiritual ideals ensures that it is to be used only to return communities to the Christian faith. As a descendant through his maternal, and therefore the Grail, line of Joseph, Galahad's mission is to continue this work. He is to return Britain to the spiritual ideals of chivalry because the court of Arthur is alienated from Christian ideals.

Galahad's next adventure demonstrates from where this worldliness has come. A monk of the abbey leads him to a tomb where the noise of a fiend drives any who hear it to lose their strength or go mad (882.3). The fiend immediately recognizes Galahad as the servant of Christ and dares him to come into the tomb. Galahad shows his almost superhuman lack of fear by entering the tomb and the fiend states that he could not remain near Galahad because he is surrounded by angels (882.18-19). Galahad has understood the story of the shield because when he sees the body which was possessed by the fiend he orders that it be removed from the tomb because it belonged to a false Christian and should not lie in consecrated ground. As Evelake and Mondrames had

removed the pagans from Britain, Galahad expels anyone, even the dead, who do not follow the precepts of the Christian faith from the community.

This episode is elaborated upon by an exegesis from a monk. The body, whose sin was so great that it had been possessed by a fiend, represented the duress of the world. This was the great sin Christ had found because the father and the son did not love each other (882.28-35). This sin, removed from the tomb by Galahad and personified into the fiend, represented the greatest threat to peace in the Arthurian world. By the standards of worldly chivalry, each knight is vying for his own personal honour and glory causing much dissension and violence. Those identified as evildoers are no longer not Christians. They are false Christians and follow worldly, rather than spiritual, ideals. This episode is prophetic because it reminds the reader that the Arthurian kingdom will be destroyed in the final battle between Arthur and his son Mordred. The Grail quest seeks to demonstrate how this sin must be removed from the world by the ideals of spiritual chivalry in order that peace may prevail. What the arrival of Galahad demands of the Arthurian world is a total rejuvenation of chivalry, so that knightly skills are used only to promote peace.

Now this particular understanding of Galahad's purpose in the Arthurian world has emerged, a new focus of his character can emerge. Another episode brings this focus into a clear view. A squire accompanies Galahad, and this squire demonstrates how those who follow the more worldly form of chivalry are ruled by their physical appetites. This squire, Melyas de Lyle, the son of the king of Denmark, demonstrates that other courts are entrenched in worldly chivalry, it is almost an universal position. Galahad is a hard taskmaster. If Melyas is to learn from him, Galahad demands that he becomes 'a myrroure unto all chevalry' (883.9). Galahad and his squire soon come across an adventure but this is a trial that tests whether Galahad or Melyas has the right attributes to be a king. The adventure begins when the two come to a fork in the road. A cross announces that a knight who is a good man and worthy knight can take the right path, whereas a knight who wishes to display his prowess can take the left path (883.24-30). This fork presents the two companions with a choice between worldly and spiritual

chivalry. Those who wish to win honour and glory in the world will take the left path, but those who follow the ideals of spiritual chivalry will take the right path.

Melyas shows his worldly inclinations when immediately he announces he will take the left. He comes to a forest clearing which requires him to make another choice. He can have either a delicious meal or a crown of gold. Both choices represent an appeal to Melyas's physical and material appetites and a spiritual knight would understand this. By taking the crown, Melyas shows how easily he is distracted by worldly rewards (884.11) and a knight immediately confronts him. Although Melyas's first instinct is to pray for deliverance, the knight strikes him down. After Galahad saves Melyas, a monk at an abbey where he is confessed tells Melyas why he has been defeated and wounded. Melyas had undertaken the quest of Grail without prior confession, and his wound is his punishment. He is guilty of the sin of pride because he took the left path at the cross and this signified that he had fallen into a sinful life. Melyas has allowed the devil to tempt him into the sin of covetousness and theft because this crown does not belong to him (886.2-25). The knights who had attacked Melyas were personifications of these two sins and could be defeated by Galahad alone because he is without sin (886.26-30). A knight who uses his skills for personal gain risks death and what is more, this death could occur when he is not confessed. Such a knight has lost his soul to the devil. Bernard's dire warning to worldly knights has indeed been proved correct by this episode. Melyas has only just escaped the fate of the worldly knight whose pride has led him to the brink of damnation. But he has realized this in time to save himself by confession.<sup>242</sup> Melyas's story presents a striking contrast to Galahad's story and acts as a poignant reminder of what happens to those who don't leave worldly ideals to follow spiritual ideals.

Galahad leaves Melyas in the care of the monks and embarks on his own adventures. He will begin his knightly mission to remove those who threaten the spiritual health of communities by taking the community away from those customs that keep it within God's care. He comes to a new landscape whose godless nature is marked by his being

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<sup>242</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 131. In the Latin, 'Non autem quia corpus occiditur, etiam anima moritur; sed anima, quae peccaverit, ipsa morietur'.

unable to hear the mass (887.2). Galahad has found himself in a land that does not acknowledge the spiritual in any form. This atmosphere is reinforced when Galahad comes to a desolate and empty chapel and prays at the altar for 'good counceyle' (887.8). He is instructed by a voice to go to the Castle of Maidens and remove their wicked customs. His mission is to return the people to God.

Galahad comes to a castle but, because it is so evil, Galahad is warned of its dangers three times as he approaches. Each time he defies the warning, signalling his holy mission by holding his shield with the sign of the cross emblazoned on it before him (887.25). Seven knights come out to meet him and Galahad overcomes them all with the sword of Balin (888.6-19). The evil oppressing the people of the castle for seven years has been removed. A religious man hands the keys of the castle to Galahad, indicating that God's presence has returned and the evil customs have been removed. Two explanations are given to explain this particular episode in the text. The first explanation, given to Galahad, looks at it from a worldly point of view. The second explanation, given to Gawain, looks at the episode from a spiritual point of view.

The worldly explanation details how seven barons had come to lodge with the duke, Lyanowre, and all had become enamoured with his daughter. The duke attempted to force them to leave but they killed him and his son. This left the castle in the hands of his daughter who could not defend it against these evil barons who began robbing and pillaging the poor people (889.17). The barons devoured many of the maidens and this is how the castle became known as the Castle of the Maidens (889.29-30). The duke's daughter died three days after the barons raped her and for seven years her younger sister and other ladies endure this outrage. The only hope of the people in the castle was their destined deliverance by Galahad. He could summon the knights living in the vicinity of the castle and demand their allegiance to the duke's surviving daughter, thereby providing for the castle the protection needed against further intrusions of evil. In this instance the castle is returned to its rightful ruler and to a peaceful existence. The spiritual explanation likens Galahad to Christ and likens the people of the Castle of Maidens to the souls trapped in slavery before Christ's coming into the world (892.11-13). They are

enslaved by sin since the seven barons are the personification of the seven deadly sins. The removal of these sins from the world had allowed the people to live in peace and harmony (892.7-11).

In these two very different interpretations of the same scenario, Galahad's mission is clearly presented. His job is to remove sin from the world. In worldly terms this means removing those who would turn communities from good to evil. These are the flesh and blood opponents that a spiritual knight working in the world must fight. In spiritual terms this means fighting against sin itself because sin enslaves the world in evil and oppressive customs. In both cases the community is removed from the presence of God. Galahad, armed with the shield of Evelake, who defeated both the Saracen who threatened the people of Sarras and the pagan who threatened the people in Britain, and the sword of Balin, whose destructive power had caused the dolorous stroke, returns the Castle of the Maidens to right living. This episode demonstrates how violence is justified in the *Sangreal*.

Galahad's last adventure in the chapter known as the *Miracles* concerns a meeting with Lancelot and Perceval. Neither one recognizes Galahad who is 'new dysgyed' (892.33). This episode can be read alongside Luke 24:13-16 where two disciples fail to recognize the risen Christ as they walk to Emmaus together.<sup>243</sup> Galahad has now attained his full spiritual potential and cannot be recognized by those steeped in the values of the world, just as Christ's disciples failed to recognize him after his appearance was transformed after the resurrection. Both Lancelot and Perceval draw their spears and are defeated by Galahad, demonstrating yet again the immense distance between the knights who adhere to Arthurian ideals of chivalry and the knights who adhere to spiritual ideals of chivalry.

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<sup>243</sup> In the Latin, 'et ecco duo ex illis ibant ipsa die in castellum quod erat in spatio stadiorum sexaginta ab Hierusalem nomine Emmaus et ipsi loquebantur ad invicem de his omnibus quea acciderint et factum est dum fabularentur et secum quaererent et ipse Iesus adpropinquans ibat cum illis oculi autem illorum tenebantur ne agnoscerent'. In the English, 'And behold, two of them went, the same day, to a town which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem, named Emmaus. And they talked together of all those things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they talked and reasoned with themselves, Jesus himself also drawing near, went with them. But their eyes were held, that they should not know him'.

Those who understand the ways of the spirit can recognize Galahad as does a hermit who identifies him to the other two knights, crying out:

‘God be with the, best knyght of the worlde! A sertes, ... and yondir two knyghtes had knowyn the as well as I do, they wolde nat have encountird with the’ (893.7-10).

Both Lancelot and Perceval must undergo many more challenges and trials before they are admitted into the presence of Galahad. This short meeting shows how others attempt to emulate him as Lancelot rides off to attempt to catch up with Galahad and Perceval returns to the hermit for more information (893.18-25). Only those who are spiritually ready can share Galahad’s company.

### **Galahad as the Premier Grail Knight**

Galahad’s adventures in the *Miracles* end as his spiritual mission is fully elucidated. His next appearance in the *Sangreal* comes in the seventh chapter, *Sir Galahad*. This chapter describes the adventures of the Grail fellowship. Galahad, Bors, and Perceval have proved that they are worthy to be included in the exclusive Grail fellowship but the premier knight of this fellowship is undoubtedly Galahad. All these adventures demonstrate how violence is justified within the ideals of spiritual chivalry but, before these adventures begin, the distance between the knights who will be admitted to the exclusive Grail fellowship and those who will be forced to return to Camelot is shown again.

Galahad’s first adventure in this new chapter will see him using violence against a member of the Round Table; he seriously wounds Gawain, a knight who has repeatedly refused to commit to spiritual ideals of chivalry. Galahad arrives at a castle in the middle of a tournament where the knights from outside the castle, who include Gawain and Ector de Marys, are slaughtering the knights inside the castle. Galahad’s feats at the tournament were of such great prowess that Gawain and Ector agree that any knight who fights with Galahad was a fool (982.22). This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as Galahad comes to Gawain and wounds him. Gawain’s horse is wounded also, as a sign that Gawain has demonstrated that he is not fit to be a knight in the Grail quest. This is the wound that Lancelot had warned Gawain that he would receive when he attempted to remove Balin’s

sword from the red marble at Camelot (857.10-13). Although Gawain was not alone in attempting to remove this sword, his unwillingness to consider spiritual ideals is shown when he refuses to amend his life and undergo a penance. His reasons for refusing the penance is that knights already suffer much pain and sadness because of their vocation (892.19-20) but he does not consider how his own knightly activities have affected the lives of others.

Gawain's wound becomes a marker of his refusal to join this new order of Camelot. This refusal to accept these spiritual ideals of knighthood will be one of the major factors in the final destruction of Camelot. When Gawain is mortally wounded, it will be in what he describes as his 'olde wounde' (1230.22). Although this refers to a wound given him by Lancelot during their civil war, when Gawain lies dying he finally comes to understand that this wound is a physical marker of his pride. He says:

And thorow me and <my> pryde ye have all thys shame and disease, for had that noble knyght, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne (1230.23-7).

Unless the knights of the Round Table come to understand that only through spiritual chivalry can they protect the community, their stubborn adherence to ideals of worldly chivalry can have only catastrophic consequences.

Having sent the decidedly worldly Gawain back to the court of Arthur, Galahad can join the other Grail knights, Bors and Perceval, in the Ship of Faith in which Perceval's sister tells the history of spiritual chivalry, and girds Galahad with the sword of David and a sheath made from her own hair. This long digression acts as a means of arming Galahad as a spiritual knight. Whereas he had refused to receive his arms from any worldly source, he is now armed by a miraculous source placing him in the scriptural tradition dating back to Adam and Eve, and stretching forward through Solomon and Christ to the time of the quest. Galahad is the last of a long series of knights who fight for the truth of Christ and the removal of sin from the world. It is significant that Galahad's, Bors's, and Perceval's next adventures involve the use of violence resulting in the deaths of their opponents. But an exploration of these adventures adds the final layer of understanding to

Galahad's mission before the final truth of the Grail is revealed at Castle Corbenic.

Leaving the Ship of the Faith, the three Grail knights and Perceval's sister arrive at a castle called Carteloyse in the marches of Scotland. Galahad shows his ultimate faith in the spiritual concepts of chivalry when he says:

He that cast us oute of the rocche shall delyver us frome hem (996.5).

The battle between the Grail knights and the inhabitants of the castle results in the deaths of many people and the Grail knights believe that they are great sinners (997.4). Nevertheless the knights console themselves in the knowledge that if God had loved these people they would not have been able to kill them. Galahad can then place the responsibility for their deaths in the hands of God. He can take this point of view because, as spiritual knights, they have become mere instruments of God's will. The violence committed against the people is God's vengeance against their evil deeds.

This point of view is confirmed when a religious man comes to the knights and describes the killings as 'almys-deed' (997.23) because those who had been killed were not christened and were not God's people. Great evil had occurred at the castle when three knights whose lust for the Earl of the castle's daughter burned so fiercely that they placed him in prison and murdered his three sons. They killed the clerks and the priests of the community also, and burned down the chapel so that mass could no longer be held. The actions of these knights had effectively removed the people from God. The Grail knights' justified violence restored the community to God.

Next the Grail knights and Perceval's sister see a vision of a white hart and four lions that lead the fellowship to a chapel where a priest is singing the mass of the Holy Ghost. The hart sits on the altar and changes into a man while the lions become respectively a man, a lion, an eagle and an ox. It is a vision of the Grail knights' purpose in the world.<sup>244</sup> The

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<sup>244</sup> These four animals are found in Ezekiel 1:10 as faces of the four heavenly beasts who accompany God as he warns the Israelites of the consequences of their disobedience to his laws. In the Latin, 'similitudo autem vultus eorum facies hominis et facies leonis a dextris ipsorum quattor et facies autem bovis a sinistris ipsorum quattor et facies aquilae ipsorum quattor'. In the English, 'and as for the likeness of their faces: there was the face of a man, and the face of a lion

hart then passed out the window without being hurt and a voice explains:

‘In such maner entred the Sonne of God into the wombe of Maydyn Mary, whos virginité ne was perished, ne hurte’ (999.14-16).

The meaning of this vision is explained. The hart is a vision of Christ as he appears sometimes to knights, proving that he overcame death. The four other creatures represent the four Gospels, which record the deeds of Christ. The Grail knights have been granted this vision because they are destined to see the spiritual truth of the Grail and act as witnesses to God’s truth in the world.<sup>245</sup> The Grail fellowship has seen that further proof of Bernard’s statement that his new knight should not fear death if he is fighting for Christ because it is only his body that dies but his soul will go to be with Christ.<sup>246</sup> Since it is only Galahad, Bors, and Perceval who have proven to be worthy to be admitted to the exclusive Grail fellowship, no other knight will see this vision (1000.5-10).

This vision has prepared the knights for their next adventure that looks at this theme of self-sacrifice or martyrdom. A true knight of Christ must be willing to lay down his life for a greater cause, and, having now seen that if death does occur while the knight is performing the work of Christ, he dies only in the body because his spirit continues to live on with Christ. Yet it is not one of the knights who must willingly lay down his life in the service of Christ, it is, in fact, the only female member of the Grail quest, Perceval’s sister. Significantly her role in the *Sangreal* has been as a teacher. She has entered the narrative as the knights board the Ship of Faith and has told them the Christian history of chivalry. She teaches them now how to die.

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on the right side of all the four: and the face of an ox, on the left side of all the four: and the face of an eagle over all the four’.

<sup>245</sup> In Revelation 4:7-8 the man, lion, ox and eagle are depicted as surrounding the throne of God and giving praise. In the Latin, ‘et animal primum simile leoni et secundum animal simile leoni et tertium animal habens faciem quasi hominis et quartum animal simile aquilae volanti et quattuor animalia singula eorum habebant alas senas et in circuitu et intus plena sunt oculis et requiem non habent die et nocte dicentia sanctus sanctus sanctus Dominus Deus omnipotens qui erat et qui venturus est’. In the English, ‘And the first living creature was like a lion; and the second living creature like a calf: and the third living creature, having the face as it were, of a man; and the fourth living creature was like an eagle flying. And the four living creatures had each of them six wings; and round about and within they were full of eyes. And they rested no day and night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come’.

<sup>246</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘In Praise of the New Knighthood’, 130. ‘Gaude, fortis athleta, si vivis et vincis in Domino; sed magis exsulta et gloriare si moreris et iungeris Domino (52)’.

Passing by another castle, the fellowship is met by a group of knights and a gentlewoman carrying a silver dish. They demand that Perceval's sister yield to the custom of the castle, which is to fill the dish with her blood to anoint the lady of the castle as a cure for her leprosy (1002.14-24). Perceval's sister agrees to this demand after a long battle between the Grail knights and the knights of the castle when she hears of the lady's circumstances. Understanding that she will be bled to death, Perceval's sister gives her reasons for her decision. She knows that her actions will give her worldly honour and will benefit her soul and, more importantly, her sacrifice will prevent any further battles between the Grail knights and the knights of the castle (1002.30-1003.2). Her death brings peace and she dies asking for the lady to pray for her and requesting that her brother Perceval place her body in a boat so that she can be buried with both Galahad and Perceval in the city of Sarras. Although the lady is healed there is a great storm and the next morning all who live in the castle are dead. A voice tells the Grail knights that this storm is retribution for the sixty maidens who were previously bled for the lady. The only part of the castle that is not damaged is the garden where their tombs lie.

The Grail knights learn that in these instances violence does have a place in spiritual chivalry even when it results in death. If the customs of a particular community are so heinous, and if the community cannot change these customs so that they align themselves with the laws of God, the knights of Christ can indeed wipe out these communities as a sign of God's vengeance. Furthermore, this violence may result in the death of the knight himself if this death will bring a peaceful resolution to conflict. But at all times what the knight of Christ must remember is that it is the prerogative of God to inflict this punishment, not the prerogative of the individual knight. Having learned these valuable lessons, the Grail knights disperse until they all meet at Castle Corbenic, the Grail castle, to witness the final spiritual truth of the Grail.

Galahad's next adventure is to get know his father, Lancelot. This is another signifier that Galahad is the herald of peace as previously the reader was told that the cause of sin in the land was that fathers and sons do not love each other. Galahad finds his father on the

boat containing the body of Perceval's sister. The two will spend six months together, living off the land and doing marvellous deeds that are not recorded (1013.3-8). In short they live in peace together sharing the abundance of the land. They represent the worldly guise of the Grail as it first appeared at Arthur's court in the *Departure*. At the end of this time, Galahad is commanded to leave his father knowing he will not see him again. In a very human touch to this almost inhuman knight, Galahad tells Lancelot that his parting prayer means more to him than any other prayer (1014.1-2). Lancelot and Galahad leave each other to find their own particular visions of the final truth of the Grail.

### **Galahad and the Truth of the Grail**

The final chapter of the *Sangreal*, *The Miracle of Galahad*, opens with Galahad performing a series of miracles. First he comes to the chapel, previously visited by Perceval where king Mordrayns awaits his arrival so he may die knowing that if he is embraced by the pure flesh of Galahad he will be cured and go to Christ (1025.15-17). Second, Galahad calms boiling water in a well that signifies that there was much lechery in the land at that time (1025.30-31). Third, he returns to the chapel where king Badgemus, Joseph son of Joseph of Arimathea and Simon are buried and underneath the chapel finds a burning tomb. Galahad is able to enter this tomb and by his mere presence the fire is put out (1026.17-20). The tomb burns because its occupant had committed a grievous sin against Joseph of Arimathea but through Galahad's intervention all the souls that lay underneath this chapel can now ascend into paradise. Galahad no longer has to use knightly violence to remove sin from a community. His presence is enough to drive it out. By these acts, the adventures of Logres have been achieved (1027.2). The physical manifestations of the kingdom's sins are purged and it is the responsibility of the people to live in peace having had the example of Galahad to show them the way. Galahad can complete his mission to heal the wound of the Maimed King at the Grail feast to be held at Castle Corbenic.

Galahad rejoins his fellow Grail knights, Perceval and Bors, and together they ride to the castle of the Maimed King. As Galahad promised back at the beginning of the *Sangreal*, he has come home to his grandfather, King Pelles (861.1). This allusion back to the very

beginning of the quest is reinforced when another challenge proves Galahad is the premier Grail knight. A broken sword, associated with Joseph, son of Joseph of Arimathea and first bishop of Christendom, is presented to each of the knights to be repaired. Both Perceval and Bors fail, but as soon as Galahad touches the sword, the pieces are set together (1027.22-23). This sword is to remain in the world as a token of the ideals of spiritual chivalry because it is given to Bors, the only Grail knight who will return to Camelot after the Grail quest.<sup>247</sup> This is a sword of power because it marks out who will be worthy to sit at the Grail table to witness its final truth (1028.1-3).

The story of Galahad has led the reader to this final moment when the mystery of the Grail is revealed at an exclusive gathering where only those who have proved themselves worthy can attend. The reader learns that the Grail quest has not been the exclusive province of the Arthurian world. Showing that the corruptions of worldly chivalry are rampant throughout the known world, three knights from three other kingdoms, Gaul, Ireland, and Denmark join Galahad, Perceval and Bors to witness this event. All these knights now represent the hope of spiritual chivalry will bring peace to the world. Before the Grail ceremony begins, a bedridden man is brought into the chamber. As a king he wears a crown of gold and he addresses Galahad:

Sir Galahad, good knyght, ye be ryght wellcom, for much have y desyred your commyng! For in such payne and in such angwysh as I have <no man ellis myght have> suffird. But now I truste to God the terme ys com that my payne shall be allayed, and [so I shall] sone passe oute of thys worlde, so as hit was promysed me longe ago (1028.22-27).

In this speech the difference between the ideals of worldly and spiritual chivalry are clearly explained. This is the Maimed King who lives in great pain from the wounds he has received in the world. Now that Galahad has arrived, bringing with him the new order of spiritual chivalry, these wounds can be healed. These wounds are inflicted as

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<sup>247</sup> Michelle R. Wright's discussion of the swords in the *Queste* notes that the sword of David, which Galahad receives from Perceval's sister on the Ship of Faith, remains in the world as a sign of the possibility of change and redemption. See Wright, 'Designing the End of History', 53. I would argue that this sword given to Bors is a more significant object of redemption in the *Sangreal* because the reader is told that it will belong to the one knight who returns to Arthur's court.

punishments for the sins committed by those who have ignored the ideals of spiritual chivalry. The wounded are those who have allowed their own desire for honour to override their allegiance to Christ and have wreaked havoc on themselves and those who have come into contact with them. The Maimed King cannot leave the world and join Christ in Heaven until his wounds are healed by the ultimate expression of spiritual chivalry, Galahad. The Maimed King's presence at this particular moment is interesting because it shows that even though all the Grail knights have travelled through an otherworldly landscape and all have had adventures involving the spirit world, they remain in the world because they can still experience pain and anguish. To escape this fate they must work towards their own salvation by following the ideals of spiritual chivalry. It will only be after their own deaths that they will find true peace with Christ.

The truth of the Grail is revealed when the heavenly realms descend to the world. Joseph, son of Joseph of Arimathea and first bishop of Christendom, Bishop of Sarras, who died three hundred years before this event, arrives accompanied by four angels and sits at a silver table on which stands the Grail, unveiled (1029.2-11). He reminds the knights that he had once lived in the world (1029.12-3). His return unites the worldly and spiritual realities, demonstrating the reality of salvation. Now these are joined in this sacred moment, the Grail ceremony can begin. Recalling when at Camelot all the doors shut and the Grail appeared, then covered by a veil (865.17-31), now a door opens and angels bring in two candles they put on the table, a cloth with which they cover the Grail, and a bleeding spear they stand upright on the Grail (1029.14-20). The message of the Grail is contained in the description of a bleeding spear placed on top of the Grail, which will act as a vessel of healing. Violence must be used for healing or, to put this in terms of spiritual chivalry, it must be used to remove that which keeps any community in the bondage of sin and separated from Christ, and the ideals of spiritual chivalry demand that any violent action must be in accordance with these principles.

The Grail ceremony begins. Joseph proceeds to perform the mass and as he lifts the host a vision of a child who was as red as any fire appears and disappears into the bread to be

used at the mass (1029.23-29).<sup>248</sup> Again, by comparing the appearance of the Grail at Camelot with the appearance of the Grail at Corbenic, the reader can derive the meaning of the vision. On the feast of Pentecost, Galahad arrived at Arthur's court wearing red armour. His presence denoted that a new type of chivalry was coming into the Arthurian world and that any knight who was to be successful in the Sangreal must follow the ideals of this new spiritual chivalry. His purpose was to provide an example for all knights to follow in all their knightly activities so that the communities which they protected could enjoy the fruits of peace. At Corbenic a red child becomes incorporated into the bread of the mass. This does not signify that Galahad is Christ, but rather that any knight who follows the ideals of spiritual chivalry is following the will of Christ. By proving themselves worthy spiritual knights, those present at this special Grail mass will understand that they are incorporating the work of Christ into their knightly activities.

To highlight this point further, a man with the bleeding wounds of Christ comes out of the Grail and tells the knights:

My knyghtes and my servauntes and my trew chyldren which bene com oute of dedly lyff into the spirituall lyff, I woll no lenger cover me frome you, but ye shall se now a parte of my secretes and of my hidde thyngs. Now holdith and resseyvith the highe order and mete whych ye have so much desired (1030.6-11).

This figure, complete with openly bleeding wounds, is positively identified as Christ when he brings the Grail to Galahad and announces that the Grail is the dish on which the sacrificial lamb was presented to Christ and the apostles (1030.19-20). The assembled company receives the flesh of Christ from the Grail, incorporating the spiritual into their material bodies, just as Christ had also eaten from the Grail at the Last Supper, incorporating the fruits of the world into his body. But what is significant about this

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<sup>248</sup> The vision of a child entering the host of the Eucharist links two separate strains of symbolism. The first emphasizes the historic Christ who was born into the flesh and the second emphasizes stresses the idea of redemption through sacrifice where those who have been born and have lived in the world can become innocent again through the sacrifice of the Eucharist. This idea connects the Nativity with the Passion, and the knights who admitted to the Grail feast are confronted with a living image of this event. They experience a mystical union between the spiritual and the worldly as this image of Christ enters the bread itself. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135-147.

moment is the emphasis on sacrifice. It is the final piece of the puzzle that demonstrates how the ideals of spiritual chivalry are so markedly different from the ideals of worldly chivalry because a spiritual knight must see his service to chivalry as a sacrifice.

The vision of Christ at this Grail ceremony clearly shows the wounds he received so willingly for his service to the world. By taking the flesh of Christ in the mass from the Grail, these knights are making a commitment to lead a life of sacrifice, giving up worldly rewards of honour and other associated pleasures of the court which are the rewards of worldly chivalry. This is the point of Galahad's story in the *Sangreal*: he shows the sacrificial nature of chivalry and this explains his refusal to become associated with the Arthurian court. True spiritual allegiance demands that he lives outside the courtly world and works to promote peace by returning communities to the ways of righteous living, or to true Christian values.

Now that the mystery of the Grail has been fully explored, the most damning statement of the Arthurian court is made to the company. Galahad is commanded to leave the Grail castle that night and to journey with the Grail, Perceval, and Bors to the city of Sarras. There, in Sarras's spiritual palace, he will see the spiritual truth of the Grail even more openly (1030.21-22). This has to occur in Sarras because the Grail is to be removed from Logres, the term used to describe Arthur's kingdom at this point in the text. Arthur's kingdom has not served Christ because so many have turned to what is known as 'evyll lyvyng' (1030.28). It has not maintained the true path as demonstrated repeatedly by the adventures of many knights throughout the *Sangreal*. Christ is removing the Grail from Logres and taking it to Sarras where a true spiritual community will be established. This leaves Galahad with one last miracle to perform before he leaves Arthur's kingdom forever: to anoint the Maimed King with the blood from the spear of the Grail ceremony in order to heal his wounds.

The Maimed King chooses not to return to the world but lives out the rest of his days as a holy man in a monastery (1031.15). He goes to find the peace and comfort he has not found living in the world of the court. Perhaps seeing the pain endured by the Maimed

King and his example of retreating from the world, Galahad makes his final request on the journey to Sarras. He asks that he may pass from the world at a time of his own choosing because, having now experienced the bliss of heaven at the Grail ceremony, he could never find this happiness within the world (1032.19-24). The sacred moment of the Grail ceremony, when the spiritual and worldly realms seemed to come together as the veil which concealed the truth of the Grail was withdrawn, has now passed. If Galahad and the Maimed King are to relive the joy of that moment, they must pass from the world, whether through the death that Galahad prays for, or living with a spiritual, rather than worldly, community. It is not possible to experience this joy within the world itself.

The Grail knights' arrival in Sarras places them firmly in the world rather than the spirit because the first person they encounter is a cripple. Yet again, the coming of a new spiritual order is announced when the cripple is healed and this miracle becomes the talk of the entire city. Although Sarras was the place in which King Evelake was converted, it is now ruled by a tyrant and pagan who puts the Grail fellowship in prison when the knights tell him of the power of God and the Grail (1033. 25-29). They are released when the tyrant becomes sick and asks for their mercy and forgiveness before succumbing to the disease. Galahad, after a voice urges the people to offer him the kingship, rules the city for a year. The Grail and its regalia are placed in a shrine and the three Grail knights come to it every day to say their prayers (1034.1-9). Unlike Camelot, Sarras is a place that maintains the ways of right living under the rule of the premier Grail knight as all in the city agree to follow the path of the spirit rather than the path of the world.

The last appearance of Galahad occurs as the knights follow their daily routine, but when they arrive at the Grail shrine they find a man dressed as a bishop, surrounded by angels. This is Joseph, first bishop of Christendom, who has returned to the world to escort Galahad to heaven. Galahad's final vision of the truth of the Grail is not explained, perhaps suggesting that this vision is outside the providence of the world. Having seen this, Galahad asks to be removed from the world as he sees its absolute wretchedness in comparison with the joys of Heaven (1034.24-26). He farewells his Grail companions but saves his last words for his father, Lancelot. He asks Bors to remind his father of the

unstablens of the world (1035.12). This could be a plea to both knights to be always mindful of the lessons of spiritual chivalry, and not to allow themselves to return to the ways of worldly chivalry. Galahad dies whilst kneeling in front of the Grail table and his soul is escorted to Heaven by a multitude of angels taking the Grail with him. The physical manifestation of the ideals of spiritual chivalry has now left the world and the human population is left with only the story of this marvellous knight who, by rejecting the honours and rewards associated with Arthurian chivalry, taught a new way of being a knight living in the world. This was a new order that promoted peace and the well-being of the community.

The hero of the *Sangreal* leaves the *Morte Darthur* and the values of the Grail are forgotten. The stage is now set for the final destruction of the Arthurian world that could not incorporate the spiritual ideals of the Grail and continued to use violence as a means of gaining more worldly honour and wealth. The veil that separates the world from the spirit is firmly placed over Camelot. The next chapter, concerning Lancelot, will investigate how a knight divided between his allegiance to the Arthurian court and his desire to follow spiritual ideals can prove himself worthy to receive a partial vision of the truth of the Grail.

## Chapter Five Sir Lancelot Du Lake

‘Sir, I say you sothe,’ seyde the damesell, ‘for ye were thys day in the morne the best knyght of the worlde. But who sholde sey so now, he sholde be a lyer, for there ys now one bettir than ye be, and well hit ys preved by the adventure of the swerde whereto ye durst nat sette to your honde. And that ys the change of youre name and levynge. Wherefore I make unto you a remembraunce that ye shall nat wene frome hensforthe that ye be the best knight of the worlde’  
(863.20-7).

### Introduction

Lancelot’s story in the *Tale of the Sangreal* is interesting because, if his journey were to be plotted on a graph alongside the knights who do actually join the exclusive Grail fellowship, it would show that his spiritual potential to achieve the Grail quest systemically decreases, rather than increases, throughout the *Sangreal* itself. This is in direct contrast to his portrayal in the earlier books in the *Morte Darthur* in which he is depicted as the best knight in the world. When the activities of the Round Table knights are examined under the gaze of Christian ideals, Lancelot’s position shifts as Galahad displaces him as the best knight. However the end of the *Sangreal* is not the end of Lancelot’s spiritual journey and his true spiritual potential is realized after the knights have returned to Arthur’s court in *The Healing of Sir Urry* in Book 7. This raises an important question about Malory’s version of the Grail legend. Dhira B. Mahoney argues that Lancelot is the doctrinal pivot through which the entire, Lancelot’s story can be interpreted as an examination of spiritual chivalry.<sup>249</sup> This makes the question of why he only partially succeeds in the Grail quest more compelling.

Many critics have grappled with the definition of Lancelot’s spirituality within the Grail legend, arriving at varying answers. Mary Hynes-Berry concludes that Malory’s *Sangreal* differs from the French *Queste del Sainte Graal* in that it is an examination not of what knighthood should be but of what it actually has become. It is the story of the fallen

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<sup>249</sup> Mahoney, ‘The Truest and Holiest Tale’, 19.

nature of humankind. She bases this argument on the assumption that Galahad operates as an ideal Christian and that this is a plane inaccessible to most ordinary human beings, whereas Lancelot operates on a human plane and fails to live up to this ideal.<sup>250</sup> Whereas Sandra Ness Ilhe challenges Mahoney by asserting that Malory makes the Grail accessible to all who live a good Christian life because he associates it with the Eucharist and thus attributes goodness basically to the grace of God.<sup>251</sup> Felicity Riddy compares the changes in the devotional practices of the early thirteenth century, as described in the *Queste*, with those of the late fifteenth century, as described in the *Sangreal*. The Grail, as the vessel of the Eucharist, becomes an object of adoration rather than contemplation, thereby identifying those knights who do achieve the vision of the Grail as witnesses, not participants. In this process, the Grail legend is secularized, as any layman could recognize his own devotional practices in the Grail ceremony.<sup>4</sup> If the Grail ceremony in Malory's *Sangreal* does reflect the devotional practices of fifteenth-century England, I would argue that Lancelot presents the layman whose spiritual journey brings him only to the door of the Grail chamber watching the ceremony because he is not a member of the Grail fellowship. The Grail knights are allowed inside the Grail chamber to participate in the actual ceremony by partaking of the host (1015.20-2). Yet this view still highlights Lancelot's success because he is the only non-Grail knight who is permitted to witness any part of the Grail ceremony and he returns to Arthur's court described as not having a 'pere of ony ertly synfull man' (934.23).

Lancelot's witnessing of the Grail ceremony is the crucial point in his presentation in the *Sangreal*. During the Grail quest, he consents to an extraordinary spiritual journey in which he subjects himself to a process of systematic humiliation as he desperately attempts to re-educate himself about his extraordinary prowess and how it can be used to benefit the community rather than benefit himself. Therefore, a significant shift in Lancelot's depiction in the *Morte Darthur* occurs. He is no longer the best knight in the world; in the *Sangreal*, the Grail knights have usurped this claim. However, Lancelot

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<sup>250</sup> Hynes-Berry, 'A Tale 'Breffly Drawyne Oute of Freynshe', 93.

<sup>251</sup> Ilhe, *Malory's Grail Queste; Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance*, 31-43.

<sup>4</sup> Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, 113-30.

shows very early in his Grail journey that he has an acute understanding of how his inner motivations have not only alienated him from the ideals of the Grail but also from the ideals of the Round Table as they are expressed in the Pentecostal Oath.<sup>5</sup> When Lancelot is denied a conscious vision of the Grail and is deprived of his helmet and sword, he recognizes that it is his sin that prevents him from being more successful in the Grail quest. In frustration as he recognizes his spiritual failure, he cries out:

My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For whan I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires I ever encheved them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no quarell, were hit right were hit wronge. And now I take upon me the adventures to seke holy thynges, now I se and undirstonde that myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me, that I had no power to stirre nother speke whan the holy bloode appered before me (896.1-9).

Lancelot is presented here as the knight who understands the difference between justified and unjustified violence. He admits that he has allowed his own desires to lead him into battle and he has committed acts of violence without considering whether or not these acts supported a right or a wrong cause. From this perspective, Lancelot's innermost intentions not only disqualify him from the membership of the exclusive Grail fellowship but also show that he has broken the Pentecostal Oath of the Round Table.

The Pentecostal Oath requires the knights of the Round Table to swear that they will not undertake any battle in a wrongful cause because they are motivated by a desire to gain the love of a lady or to increase their own worldly wealth (120.23-4). Although Lancelot understands that he has sought adventures in which he can display his prowess for his own gain, he has not examined how his love for Guinever influenced his decisions. This is the core of Lancelot's penance throughout his Grail journey which focuses on two distinct issues. First, it tests whether or not Lancelot deserves the reputation of being the best knight in the world. Second, it prepares the reader for Lancelot's role in the final destruction of Arthurian civilization. This occurs because the *Sangreal* shines a light on Lancelot's inner motivations rather than describing his outward presentation as occurred

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<sup>5</sup> Hynes-Berry, 'A Tale 'Brefly Drawyne Oute of Freynshe', 98. Hynes-Berry states that in the *Sangreal* Lancelot is condemned for being guilty of adultery but because he has allowed his love for Guinevere to interfere with how he interprets the chivalric code.

in his earlier appearances in the *Morte Darthur*. In short, his journey in the Grail quest is an exposé of what he believes deep down in his heart.

To understand how the *Sangreal* changes the presentation of Lancelot, an examination of his reputation at Arthur's court is necessary. In the *Departure*, Arthur's description of Lancelot as the best knight in the world (856.18-19) agrees with his depiction at the beginning of his own tale, the *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lake*:

But in especial hit was prevyd on sir Launcelot de Lake, for in all turnementes, justys, and dedes of armys, both for lyff and deth, he passed all other knyghtes, and at no tyme was he ovircom but yf hit were by treson other inchaument (253.8-12).

This description highlights two aspects of Lancelot's early presentation in the *Morte Darthur*. First, it shows his ability as a knight and second, it shows that Arthur and his court are not concerned with the causes of violence. Lancelot is the best knight in the world because he can overcome all opposition in any situation where the use of violence is required. When the portrait of Lancelot in the *Sangreal* is compared with his introductory portrait in his own tale, it becomes clear that the Grail is introducing an entirely new ethic concerning the use of a knight's fighting ability or his prowess. The spiritual trials Lancelot faces when he undertakes the Grail journey test his inner motivations, not just his ability to win a battle.

Lancelot's willing submission to the extraordinary penance during the *Sangreal* demonstrates his desire to gain a new spiritual understanding of chivalry and his success can be measured by the fact that he is allowed to witness the Grail ceremony. Lancelot's tragedy is that his instinctive reactions and responses to decisions about whether or not he should use violence are based upon his own needs and not the needs of others.<sup>7</sup> This flaw prevents him from joining the Grail fellowship. Lancelot's true spiritual potential is not properly realized until the *Sangreal* has been completed and he has returned to the court of Arthur and healed the wounded Sir Urry.<sup>8</sup> His spiritual journey spills out beyond the

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<sup>7</sup> Bradstock, 'Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*, The Culmination of Tradition', 218-219. Bradstock says that Lancelot fails his spiritual tests.

<sup>8</sup> Radulescu, 'Now I Take Uppon Me the Adventures to Seke of Holy Things, Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood', 291-295. Radulescu argues that the *Tale of Sir Urry* shows a

borders of the *Sangreal* into the *Morte Darthur* as a whole. If Lancelot had shown successfully that he not only understood the ideals of spiritual chivalry, but could also curb his instinctively violent reactions to any threat, could he have prevented the downfall of Arthur's court?<sup>9</sup> By the time the healing of Urry occurs, events have overtaken any chance to prevent the civil war, which creates the necessary conditions for the final battle where Arthur is killed. Only when the kingdom is destroyed, and both Arthur and Guinever have passed from the world, can Lancelot embrace spiritual ideals, which he does by forgoing his knightly career, taking holy orders and dying as a priest (1258.7-10).<sup>10</sup> Thus his spiritual journey continues through the entire *Morte Darthur* and he shows that he is divided between the demands of the court and its worldly view of chivalry and his desire to fulfil the demands of the Grail and the spiritual view of chivalry. To demonstrate this point of view, and without denying the existence of a more positive view of Lancelot, I will examine certain instances examine his divided nature.

### **Lancelot's Fall from Spiritual Ideals**

The portrait of Lancelot begins in the *Morte Darthur* in his own tale, *The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake* (249-287). He demonstrates here that he has a reasoned understanding of spiritual ideals of chivalry and that he wishes to practise his knightly skills from this point of view. It is the demands of the court that force him to compromise his ideals. He finds he is unable to extricate himself from the court of Arthur, which binds him through ties of allegiance to Arthur on the public plane and his love for Guinever on the private plane. These spiritually destructive ties are exposed continually throughout his

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Lancelot who has learned from his adventures in the *Sangreal*. I would argue Lancelot has demonstrated this ability to perform miracles previously but his 'unstableness' in spiritual matters makes this ability sporadic rather than consistent.

<sup>9</sup> Moorman, 'Malory's Treatment of the Sankgreall', 503. Moorman argues that Lancelot understands the differences between a chivalry based on worldly ideals and a chivalry based on spiritual ideals, but he cannot act on the differences. This disability makes Lancelot a tragic hero because he has the potential to prevent the destruction of the Round Table.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Cherewatuk, 'Malory's Launcelot and the Language of Sin and Confession', *Arthuriana* 16, (2006), 67-72, 71. Cherewatuk argues that the *Sangreal* does not end until Lancelot's death because it is not until this point in the *Morte Darthur* that Lancelot completes the penance he begins in the Grail quest.

Grail journey. When he returns to the court and resumes his affair with Guinever, a collision between his public and private allegiances occurs, acting as the catalyst for the destruction of Arthurian civilization. The great tragedy of the *Sangreal* is that Lancelot does not practise the spiritual lessons he so painfully learned in the Grail quest after his return to Arthur's court.

Lancelot's tie to Arthur is public because it is cemented by the usual martial allegiances found between a vassal and his king, which date to events that occurred before his birth. These are described in the first chapter of the opening book of the *Morte Darthur*, *Merlin in The Tale of King Arthur*. Lancelot's father, Ban of Benwick, and his uncle, Bors of Gaul, help secure the throne for Arthur when Lot of the Orkneys denies his right to the throne and leads a rebellion against the newly crowned Arthur. In return Arthur promises to help Ban and Bors in their struggle against Claudas of France (18.11-20.27). Thus, Lancelot is born into a world where his family allegiance to Arthur has been established before his birth, and this tie is strengthened further in Lancelot's own generation when Arthur returns the ancestral lands of the family to Lancelot and his kinsman, Bors, when the knights of the Round Table defeat Claudas during the Roman War in *The Tale of the Noble King Arthur* (245.13-23). Lancelot is beholden to Arthur for all his lands in the feudal manner but, in spiritual terms, this allegiance should only be a source of dispute if Arthur's court does not obey the will of God.

The other factor creating a tie between Lancelot and the court is his love for the queen, Guinever. The threat that this affair poses to the court is shown when Merlin warns Arthur about the great love Lancelot and Guinever will share when Arthur first discusses this marriage with him:

But M[e]rlyon warned the king covertly that Gwennyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne, and so he turned his tale to the adventures of the Sankegreal (97.29-32).

The affair is damaging to Arthur in public terms because his marriage to Guinever was a political solution to the continuing disunity of the barons at the beginning of his reign. It resulted in the return of the Round Table to the court (97.9-26). The Round Table was the

symbol of the knightly fellowship that Arthur believed protected the kingdom from unjustified violence. Thus, Lancelot's and Guinever's illicit affair, from the beginning of the *Morte Darthur*, is presented as the underlying cause of the unjustified violence that will sweep through the kingdom as it is destroyed.

Initially, this love between Lancelot and Guinever is explained in courtly love terms as he performs great feats of arms in honour of the queen, but the reader is reminded that it will develop into the treacherous physical love which condemns Guinever to be burnt when the affair becomes public in Book Eight:

Wherefore quene Gwennyvere had him in grete favoure aboven all other knyghtis, and so he loved the quene agayen aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her from the fyre thorow his noble chivalry (253.15-19).

The early books of the *Morte Darthur* establish Lancelot as possessing the greatest physical prowess of all the knights of the Round Table, and this renders him indomitable. He will not be displaced as the greatest knight by violence but by his relationship with Guinever, and Lancelot understands this danger. As his star rises in the *Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lake*, he explains why a knight must not marry or take a lover. He has been accused of disappointing many other ladies because of his love for the queen, which is believed by many to be the result of an enchantment (270.23). He says that a knight who is an adulterer or lives in lechery risks being killed by a lesser knight or killing another by misfortune. A knight who takes a lover invites misfortune not only for himself but also for everything around him (270.32-71.4). Lancelot understands the implications of his love for Guinevere. He knows that if he takes a lover, he is living in a state of sin. Hence, his divided nature is exposed. On one hand, he is the best knight in the world and is willing to forego the companionship of a woman for his knightly profession, but on the other hand, he will give in to his worldly desires. Lancelot's divided nature is revealed further in the *Morte Darthur* before the *Tale of the Sangreal* begins. It is uncovered in *Launcelot and Elaine* (787-833), the fourteenth chapter of the *Book of Tristram*.

*Launcelot and Elaine* begins with an announcement of Galahad's birth and his destiny to become the premier Grail knight because he is the knight who will take the Sege Perillous at the Round Table. But this is a future event and Lancelot remains the best knight in the world. He takes himself on an adventure coming to the castle and town ruled by Pellas, a descendent of Joseph of Arimathea and the current keeper of the Grail. The visit to the Grail castle has a distinct purpose because it will result in Lancelot fathering Galahad by Elaine, the daughter of Pelles. This sexual union is a spiritual task because its purpose is to bring the premier knight of the Grail quest into the world but Lancelot's love for Guinever almost prevents this act from occurring. Guinever compromises Lancelot's spiritual destiny.

The first episode in this adventure shows that he begins this journey as a knight who follows the ideals of spiritual chivalry. At this point in the *Morte Darthur*, Lancelot has not yet succumbed to the temptations of the world, and, as the best knight in the world, he is able to perform miraculous deeds. Lancelot arrives in this fair and prosperous town to find a great evil lurking within (791.24-28). His first task is to rescue a lady who has been boiling in water for five years, having had an enchantment placed upon her by Morgan le Fayre and the Queen of the North Gales (791.31-792.20). This lady, who is naked and the fairest lady Lancelot has ever seen besides Guinever, does not attract Lancelot physically. He demonstrates that his thoughts are with God because he immediately accompanies her to the chapel where both give thanks (792.21-28). What this episode demonstrates is that Lancelot can maintain his chastity because he shows no physical desire for the naked lady. However, during his next adventure, his divided nature is revealed. Although he kills a serpent terrorizing the townsfolk, gold letters in the tomb where the serpent is found announce:

HERE SHALL COM A LYBARDE OF KYNGES BLOOD AND HE SHALL SLE  
THIS SERPENTE. AND THIS LYBARDE SHALL ENGENDIR A LYON IN THIS  
FORAYNE CONTREY WHICHE LYON SHALL PASSE ALL OTHER KNYGHTES  
(793.3-5).

Lancelot's spiritual destiny is laid before him. He has come to the Grail castle to father Galahad, the lion who will replace him as the greatest knight in the Arthurian world.

Lancelot is depicted as a leopard, the creature that is the offspring of the lion and the mythical pard, a creature who, like Lancelot, is stuck between his desire to live a spiritual life and his desire to live a worldly life.

This is a blessed land because, despite the evil that has lurked within its own underbelly, the presence of the Grail ensures that the land remains prosperous. As a reward for Lancelot's defeat of the twin evils plaguing the inhabitants of the town a vision of the Grail appears as soon as Lancelot and King Pelles take refreshments (793.21-30). A sweet aroma, reminiscent of all the spices of the world, fills the room and is followed by the appearance of a table that contains any type of food or drink that anyone can imagine (793.23-26). If anyone is left in any doubt that these are the gifts of the Grail, a young woman carries a vessel of gold through the room (793.27-28). Although all these gifts of the Grail to Lancelot and Pelles are the fruits of the world, Pelles knows that they come from God and he immediately falls to his knees in prayer (793.28-30). He rules his kingdom in accordance with the laws of God and, as a result, abundance sustains the land because there is harmony between the ideals of the world and the ideals of the spirit. At this point in the *Morte Darthur*, Lancelot's own version of chivalry and the manner in which he uses his knightly skills are in harmony with both the world and with God. But the fact that he is actually ignorant of this state of affairs becomes evident when after the Grail and its gifts appear, Lancelot asks Pelles to explain the meaning of this vision (793.31).

Lancelot's ignorance has implications for both the Grail castle and for the Round Table. Pelles's kingdom is currently blessed by the presence of the Grail but he knows that it will depart and appear at the court of Arthur announcing the beginning of the Grail quest. This, as Pelles says, will result in the break up of the Round Table fellowship for a season (793.32-36). Since it is the presence of the Grail that maintains the peace and prosperity of Pelles's kingdom, steps are taken to prevent any serious consequences. This includes the conception of a child, Galahad, by Pelles's daughter, Elaine, fathered by Lancelot. Galahad is destined to return the Grail to Pelles's kingdom and he will bring this foreign

country out of danger (794.7-8). Even the conceiving of a child takes on communal importance when a kingdom is threatened with disaster.

This scenario parallels the situation at the court of Arthur. The Grail comes to Arthur's court to introduce a new order of spiritual chivalry to the knights of the Round Table. Each knight is challenged to look at his own use of his knightly skills and decide whether he uses these skills to gather worldly rewards by fighting battles for their own individual gain or to promote peace within individual communities. When the majority of the knights fail to incorporate this new spiritual order of chivalry into their own knightly practice, the Grail leaves Britain, taking those who have been admitted into the Grail fellowship to Sarras (1030.22-29). Once the protection of the Grail is removed from Britain, the decline of Arthurian civilization begins. Hence, Lancelot's destiny to father Galahad on Elaine has implications both for the Grail kingdom and for Arthur's kingdom because the Grail quest is a last-ditch attempt to incorporate Christian ideals of chivalry into the Round Table fellowship. Lancelot's challenge is to put away any personal feelings for Guinever in order to father Galahad so this aim can be achieved.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, knowing that this is probably impossible, the Grail court decide that the match between Lancelot and Elaine can be achieved by deception only. Elaine's nurse, Dame Brusen, tricks Lancelot into believing that Guinever waits for him in the Castle of Case five miles away (794.10-29). Arriving at the castle and after consuming too much to drink, Lancelot goes to Elaine and Galahad is conceived. But the issue of the correct use of violence comes into play the following morning when Lancelot awakes and realizes that it is Elaine and not Guinever beside him. His first reaction is to draw his sword and threaten to kill Elaine (795.26-28). What this episode shows is not only that Lancelot is ignorant of his spiritual destiny, spelt out to him when he entered the tomb of the serpent,

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Scala, 'Disarming Lancelot', *Studies in Philology* 99, (2002), 380-404, 393. Scala argues that Lancelot lies with Elaine because he believed that she was Guinever. Therefore the Grail is achieved because the love between Lancelot and Guinever led to the conception of Galahad. Although this is an intriguing point of view, I would argue that it is this love that allows Lancelot to be deceived in this instance and to take unnecessary risks, as shown further when he caught in Guinever's chamber by Aggravayne and the other conspirators (1164.34-1165.2).

but also that his love for Guinever has caused him to break one of the tenets of the Pentecostal Oath. First, if he had understood the meaning of the letters of gold in the tomb and the significance of the appearance of the Grail, he would know that all the signs pointed towards his destiny as the father of Galahad. Second, he has broken the oath of chivalry administered to each knight of the Round Table at Pentecost because he has threatened the life of a lady (120.21). Lancelot's desire for Guinever is the chink in his armour that allows others to manipulate and defeat him. At the beginning of the *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lake* Lancelot is described as invincible if physically attacked, and so he can be overcome only by treason or enchantment (253.11-12). It was Lancelot's decision to go to the one he thought was the queen and, by sleeping her, commit treason against his own temporal lord, and this treason allowed him to be deceived by Dame Brusen. This is the same treason that will prevent him from joining the ranks of the Grail knights.

This episode shows how easily Lancelot forgets the spiritual ideals with which he began his knightly career. To emphasize how his affair with Guinever damages his spiritual potential, he is deceived by Dame Brusen a second time and sleeps with Elaine again believing that she is Guinever. Guinever's discovery of his unfaithfulness results in a period of madness, which is eventually healed by the Grail when Elaine recognizes him (824.23-7). His allegiance to the king and his emotional tie to the queen remain despite the bounties he has received from the Grail (827.10-4). This battle between a life lived by worldly standards and a life lived by spiritual standards continues until after the death of Guinever when he takes holy orders.

### **Lancelot's Divided Allegiance**

Lancelot's spiritual fall is shown in *Lancelot and Elaine*, the fourteenth chapter of the *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones*. As his affair with the queen is exposed, he is no longer depicted as the faultless hero of the Round Table evident in *The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake*. This spiritual fall continues and gains momentum in the *Sangreal* as Lancelot's motivations are scrutinized. From the opening sequence in the *Departure*, Lancelot's divided loyalties are highlighted. A gentlewoman from the court of Pelles

arrives at the court of Arthur as the knights gather to renew the Pentecostal Oath at the annual feast. A messenger from the Grail castle summons Lancelot away from the court (853.13-14). He prepares to leave immediately but Guinever demands that he returns to the court the following morning in order to keep her good will (853.26-27). The gentlewoman leads Lancelot to a nunnery where he meets up with his cousins, Bors and Lionel. What these three details at the beginning of the *Sangreal* emphasize is Lancelot's continuing divided loyalties. First, he shows his allegiance to the Grail court because he immediately answers its summons. Second, he is emotionally tied to Guinever because the gentlewoman agrees that he will return to the feast at Arthur's court the following morning. And third, he demonstrates his love for his family, which is shown by his joy when he is reunited with Bors and Lionel (854. 1-3).

Lancelot's challenge in the Grail quest is to reconcile the three loyalties and the key to this reconciliation is found in his relationship to his son, Galahad. He comes face-to-face with Galahad, who signifies his allegiance to God by arriving in the company of twelve nuns. Lancelot's spiritual ignorance is shown when his innermost thoughts are described and he shows no sign of recognition. He thinks that this young squire is 'semely and demure as a dove' (854.19).<sup>252</sup> Lancelot first encountered the dove just before the Grail appeared at the court of Pelles in *Lancelot and Elaine*. The dove came to the window with a censer in its mouth and released the sweet smell of the world's spices into the Grail castle (793.22-24). As this prior appearance of the Grail had produced such a sweet odour, Galahad is described as someone whose 'beauté faylith you none as ony that ys now lyvinge' (854.29-30). What both these images have in common is a sense of otherworldly greatness because both the sweet odour and Galahad's beauty cannot be matched within this world. The Grail and Galahad represent a new spiritual reality, and Lancelot will be challenged throughout his Grail journey to develop an understanding of

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<sup>252</sup> The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and God's promise to the world that he will never destroy the world with a flood. In Genesis 8:8, Noah sends out a dove from the ark to see if the waters have receded from the land and when the dove does not return he can leave the ark and make a sacrifice to God. A dove also descends from heaven when Jesus is baptized as discussed previously. See Matthew 3:16-17.

this new reality. But at this point in the *Sangreal*, he shows no outward sign of recognition.

Galahad distances himself from Lancelot because, even though Lancelot performs the ceremony that makes him a knight, Galahad does not return to Arthur's court with him. Lancelot remains firmly within a worldly reality when he joins his kinsmen, Bors and Lionel, in the journey to the feast of Pentecost at the court (854.34-855.4). Even this detail alludes to Lancelot's struggle between a spiritual and worldly view of chivalry. His position between Bors, who will prove his spiritual worth in the *Sangreal* and join the exclusive Grail fellowship, and Lionel, who is so entrenched in the ideals of worldly chivalry that he allows his passions to overcome his reason and attempts to kill his brother Bors, is significant. Lancelot is a knight who swings between these two extremes and cannot be placed in the camp either of spiritual chivalry or the camp of worldly chivalry.

However, Lancelot does have an understanding of spiritual ideals and this shown when his position as the best knight in the world is challenged by the episode of the sword in the red marble stone in the *Departure*. A message on the stone says that only the best knight in the world can remove the sword (856.13-15). Arthur naturally asks Lancelot to remove the sword. Lancelot knows that this sword is not destined for him and sees that the price of the spiritual pride exhibited by any who attempt to remove the sword is to be wounded (856.23). Having shown his spiritual understanding by refusing this task, Lancelot becomes the first member of the Round Table to recognize and announce the commencement of the Grail quest (856.25-27). From the outset of the Grail quest, Lancelot knows that he is not destined to be a member of the exclusive Grail fellowship and his acceptance of this demonstrates his humility.

It is this humility that motivates the extraordinary penance Lancelot undertakes. Lancelot's spiritual humility is shown further when Galahad arrives at the court and Lancelot's displacement as the best knight in the world is publicly announced. Before the entire court a young woman broadcasts that:

‘Wherefore I make unto a remembraunce that ye shall nat wene frome hensforthe that ye be the best knight of the worlde’ (863.25-7).

Lancelot accepts his newly subordinate position with a simple statement:

‘As towchyng unto that,’ seyde sir Launcelot, ‘I know well I was never none of the beste’ (863.28-29).

The young woman explains his true position within the hierarchy of this new order of spiritual knighthood. Lancelot is the best knight of any sinful man in the world (863.30-31). Unlike the knights who are admitted to the exclusive fellowship of the Grail, Galahad, Bors, and Perceval, Lancelot does not expunge all traces of sin from his entire being. During his journey through the Grail quest, he demonstrates his inclination to sin by not correctly identifying the spiritual signs placed before him, just as he misunderstood the signs at the Grail castle when he fathered Galahad. He cannot let go of all his desires and passions, when he is confronted with the same spiritual trials and temptations as the Grail knights. However, his willingness in attempting to do this by submitting to a process of penance and humiliation that makes him the best sinful knight in the world.

At the beginning of the *Sangreal* Arthur and Guinever show their resistance to the ideals of spiritual chivalry. They seek to restore Lancelot’s reputation as the best knight in the world. First, Arthur ends a tournament before Lancelot meets his son in a joust. Galahad has demonstrated his remarkable physical prowess against the knights of the Round Table and seems certain to win. Arthur protects Lancelot’s reputation as being invincible in any battle. Second, Guinever announces that it is no surprise that Galahad won the tournament because he is Lancelot’s son (865.2-3). She emphasizes their equal prowess by acknowledging also that it is a gift of God because both are descended from Christ in the eighth and ninth degree (865.7-12). However, Lancelot shows his better understanding of spiritual matters when he defends the quest by reminding Arthur that the Round Table will acquire far greater honour if the knights die in the Grail quest, in the service of God, rather than in the service of Arthur. However, Lancelot knows that he cannot escape his sin, and before leaving Arthur’s court he secretly goes into Guinever’s chamber and asks to return to that chamber when he returns from the quest (872.12-13).

But it is not just his sinful love for the queen that keeps him moored to the court; it is also his desire to prove his worth using his physical, rather than spiritual, prowess. It is these two desires, the sins of lechery<sup>12</sup> and pride<sup>13</sup> that demonstrate why Lancelot will not be invited to join the Grail fellowship.

Galahad's greater physical prowess is confirmed in the *Miracles*. When Lancelot and Perceval come across a disguised Galahad, their instinct is to draw their swords against him. Both are overcome by Galahad's own physical strength (892.33-893.4). But this particular episode shows why Lancelot does not become a member of the Grail fellowship. Lancelot's failure is that although he has articulated and demonstrated his understanding of spiritual chivalry, he automatically turns to violence when he is threatened. Although Perceval, a future member of the Grail fellowship, has reacted in the same way, their next actions show that Perceval seeks a spiritual solution by returning to his aunt, a hermit, for advice. Lancelot's mundane focus is exposed when he continues to search for Galahad in the waste forest showing that he is spiritually lost. This is demonstrated when he arrives at a cross near the road and he cannot read the directions now that it is dark (893.25-28). His spiritual alienation from God is completed when his attempts to enter a broken and abandoned chapel, where he sees candlelight on the altar, are denied because he is living in a state of sin (894.1-3). Distressed that he cannot have some form of spiritual succour, Lancelot returns to his horse and arms and lies down to sleep next to the cross (894.7-8).

While living in a state of sin, Lancelot can receive spiritual advice only when he can access his subconscious mind in a state of being half asleep. He sees a sick knight carried

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<sup>12</sup> Colossians 3:5 identifies lechery with idolatry. In the Latin, 'mortificate ergo membra vestra quae sunt super terram fornicationem inmunditiam libidinem concupiscentiam malam et avaritiam quae est simulacrorum servitus'. In the English, 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence, and covetousness is the service of the idols'. If Lancelot's love for Guinever is seen as the sin of lechery, his alienation from God becomes explicit because he will place his love for the queen before his love for God. She can be likened to the 'graven images' of the Old Testament.

<sup>13</sup> Pride is a sign of Lancelot's alienation from God. See 1 Timothy 3:6. In the Latin, 'non neophytum ne in superbia elatus in iudicium incidat diaboli'. In the English, 'not a neophyte: lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the judgement of the devil'.

to the cross and prays that the Grail might heal him. The Grail appears on a silver table, which Lancelot recognizes because he has already seen it at the Grail castle, and the sick knight is cured when he kisses the Grail (894.29-31). Lancelot cannot summon the Grail to remove his own pain and spiritual abandonment because he is not confessed (894.10-1). Furthermore, in a spiritual landscape, Lancelot forfeits his accoutrements of knighthood, his arms and his horse, to the knight who has been healed by the power of the Grail. He is no longer worthy to be a knight. Remaining half sleep, Lancelot cannot use his physical strength to retain his former possessions. A voice in the wilderness describes his spiritual abandonment as:

Sir Launcelot, more harder than ys the stone, and more bitter than ys the woode, And more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge-tre! Therefore go thou hens, and withdraw the from thys holy places! (895.25-28).

Lancelot is so removed from God that he is no longer able to bear any kind of spiritual fruit. Therefore he must not act as a knight because he will not act for the good of the communities and he is forbidden to come near holy places.

This metaphorical association of Lancelot with the fig tree illustrates the purpose of knighthood within any society if it is read against Deuteronomy 8: 6-10. God tells the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt that he is bringing them to a land of abundance and he lists the natural goodness found within it: wheat, barley, vines and fig trees and pomegranates, olive oil and honey. A fig tree is one of the gifts of God to his people to sustain them. The fig tree metaphor says that the purpose of a knight in the community is to sustain the people and God will keep those who obey his laws in great abundance. This image of the fig tree as a sign of the abundance of God is seen in Mark 13:26-8:

And then shall they see the son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now of the fig tree learn ye a parable. When the branch thereof is tender and the leaves are come forth, you know that summer is very near.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the Latin, 'et tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nubibus cum virtute multa et Gloria et tunc mittet angelos suos et congregabit electos suos a quatuor ventis a summo terrae usque ad

But if God's laws are broken this abundance will disappear. Lancelot has shown that he instinctively relies on his own will, not God's will, when he is confronted with a situation that has the potential to produce violence, and he is no longer of benefit to the community. Another fig tree metaphor demonstrates this spiritual alienation in Matthew 21:18-19:

And in the morning he was hungry. And seeing a certain fig tree by the wayside, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only, and he saith to it: May no fruit grow on thee from henceforward forever. And immediately the fig tree withered away.<sup>15</sup>

Lancelot, who is described as the leaf of a fig tree, came to the court of Arthur with much potential to protect the community from the ravages of evil, but he has removed himself so far from the will of God that he is no longer useful. Like the fig tree in Matthew, he can only be left to wither. Lancelot shows his understanding of the analogy to the fig tree when he describes himself as being locked into shame by his old sin (896.5-7).

### **The Nature of Lancelot's Transgression Against Spiritual Chivalry**

Lancelot's loss of his knightly equipment is so distressing that he asks God for mercy (896.17-18). The hermit tells Lancelot that he should not cry for mercy because of the gifts God had bestowed on him. Lancelot has more worship in the world than any other knight currently living, but he had dared to enter into God's presence while in a state of sin (896.31-897.1). As the fig tree represented the abundance of God's creation in the world, the hermit lists the gifts Lancelot received from God, beauty, rewards, graciousness and greater prowess than other knights (897.3-4) and Lancelot did not use these gifts in obedience to God. He understands that his knightly skills were used to win Guinever's favour and he did not care whether he was fighting for a right or a wrong cause. His love of the queen has been greater than his love of God (897.17-19) and he did not thank God for his gifts (897.22). The hermit advises Lancelot not to enter into the queen's company again because she induces his hardness or spiritual forgetfulness. When

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summum caeli a ficu autem discite parabolam cum iam ramus eius tener fuerit et nata fuerint folia'.

<sup>15</sup> In the Latin, 'mane autem revertens in civitatem esuriit et videns fici arborem unam secus viam venit ad eam et nihil invenit in ea nisi folia tantum et ait illi numquam ex te fructus nascatur in sempiternum et arefacta est continuo ficulnea'.

Lancelot agrees to take any necessary penance to right himself with God, he is restored to his knightly status by receiving a horse and the other accoutrements of knighthood. Lancelot's next step in his Grail journey is to prove that he utilizes these gifts in God's service.

### **Lancelot's Spiritual Instruction**

The question of the justification of the use of violence is examined in *Sir Lancelot*, the chapter devoted to Lancelot in the *Sangreal* in which the proper justification of violence is shown to him. The first episode demonstrates how a spiritual knight reacts to violence and the second episode shows how Lancelot has neglected the spiritual ideals passed down to him by his ancestors. The first episode begins when Lancelot comes to a chapel and sees a religious man presiding over a dead body. The religious man believes that the dead man has died in a state of sin because he has broken a rule of the order by wearing a prohibited shirt (926.1-2). A demon is summoned to ascertain whether the dead man has been saved or whether he is damned. The demon answers that man has been saved because of his reaction to a violent situation. The dead man, who came from a noble family and was, by inference, a knight, was forced to leave the hermitage and his religious life in order to help his nephew defend himself against an earl who was warring against him. Because of the dead man's great wisdom and prowess, the earl was defeated, peace was restored, and he returned to his holy life (926.3-15). This situation demonstrates that the holy man had made a correct decision about the use of his knightly skills because peace was restored to the community.

The earl instructed his nephews to kill the holy man and they came to the hermitage to find him celebrating the Mass. Although the murdering nephews waited until the Mass was concluded to set about their grisly business, they found that their swords could not penetrate his body, so they threw the holy man into a fire having removed his holy vestments and hair shirt. Yet the fire could not destroy his body, which remained perfectly intact in the shirt that so offended the sensibilities of the priest (926.16-927.2). At no stage during this attack had the holy man attempted to resist his murderers and the demon states that they left the hermitage in great fear. The holy man's preserved body

shows that his great faith had led him to salvation by resisting the temptation to use violence to save himself. This is in direct contrast to Lancelot who quickly resorts to the use of violence when he is threatened.

This episode has even greater significance. Whereas Lancelot has been compared to the rotten fig tree that cannot accept the grace of God because he remains in a state of sin, this holy man's body has remained intact despite his ordeal in the fire.<sup>16</sup> Another distinction has thus been made between Lancelot and the holy man. It was assumed that the holy man died in a state of sin because he was found not wearing his holy vestments and hair shirt but the demon explained that he died in great faith and received salvation. This episode demonstrates that outward appearances do not reveal the state of a person's soul. The idea that outward appearances do not reveal the true state of a person's soul has implications for Lancelot because he has received so many blessings from God, such as his great beauty, prowess and courtly manners. Because of these great blessings, Lancelot is lauded as the greatest knight in the world by the court, but secretly he continues to live in sin. The hermit who hears his confession suggests that he avoid contact with Guinever when he returns to court. He is anxious that what Lancelot says he will do is in accord with what he will actually do (897.29-31). Lancelot cannot rely on appearances to ensure his future salvation; he must rely on his inner spiritual state. Lancelot puts on the holy man's hair shirt as he is beginning his penance. He agrees not to eat meat nor drink wine and agrees to attend the Mass every day (927.25-31).

The second episode in Lancelot's spiritual instruction reveals the nature of Lancelot's sin. He falls asleep at another cross and sees a man coming to him surrounded by stars and with a gold crown on his head. Seven kings and two knights follow this man and they

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<sup>16</sup> In the middle ages, it was a sign of sanctity if a body did not decompose or become corrupted after death. Thus, the knight's body remaining unscarred after spending an entire night in the fire is proof of his holiness. Other examples flourish through the literature of the entire medieval period, especially in hagiography. Many early examples of uncorrupted bodies can be found in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* written in 731 by the Venerable Bede. See for instance chapter 19, in which the death of Queen Ethelreda is described. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price; revised R.E. Latham (London, Penguin, 1990), 236-239.

look towards the heaven and ask God to give each of them what they deserve. An old man descends from heaven in the company of angels and calls all the kings and knights his servants and true knights except for one (928.19-31). He tells this knight that he has not used the great gifts given to him by God because he has used his prowess to fight for causes that are not righteous because he seeks glory in the world, not glory in God. The knight will be refused the rewards of God (928.34-929.2).

The religious man deciphers the vision of the seven kings and the two knights in which Lancelot's fathering of Galahad is explained. Lancelot's forebears reach back to the time of Joseph of Arimathea when the hermit, Nacien, came to Britain with Evelake after their conversion to Christianity and the defeat of the Saracens in Sarras (929.31-33). This story represents the correct use of knightly violence: a Christian knight fights against the enemies of God to remove any evildoer from a community who will endanger the souls of those living in the community by preventing them from following the will of God. Lancelot's ancestors have all been kings who have established Christian customs within their respective lands, which through marriage have included Wales, Gaul and Ireland (930.2-9). Lancelot has not followed the ideals of spiritual chivalry and could not be included within their fellowship. Yet, he had fulfilled his destiny and had fathered Galahad, the greatest of them all (930.11-16). The religious man admonishes Lancelot further because he has not thanked God for the great gifts given to him, making him the greatest knight in the world despite his sin. Finally, realizing that Galahad is, indeed, his son, Lancelot prays that he will not fall into sin again (930.29-30). Lancelot is warned not to attempt to do battle with his son because he will be defeated (930.26-29). Contemplating these events, Lancelot goes to bed and experiences the pain of the hair shirt, which he bears meekly (931.7-9). Lancelot's displacement as the best knight in the world by those who understand the spiritual significance of the Grail quest becomes the key to his own spiritual progress. He must demonstrate a new found humility by accepting that his son, Galahad, has taken his place as the best knight in the world. Lancelot must not attempt to fight any battle against any knight who has proven to have a greater understanding of spiritual principles.

### **Lancelot's Continuing Spiritual Failures**

Having been shown so explicitly how he has transgressed the will of God, Lancelot can no longer be ignorant of how he must use his knightly prowess but, upon waking, he demonstrates that he has not learned these lessons. Lancelot's failure to learn his spiritual lessons is demonstrated in the next two episodes both of which show that Lancelot has not understood his spiritual lessons. First, he meets the knight who took his knightly equipment after the Grail healed the knight in the abandoned chapel. He defeats this knight and causes him great injury by nearly breaking his neck (929.3-17). If Lancelot had understood that this wounded knight's healing by the Grail was a sign of his adherence to the spiritual ideals of chivalry, he should have gladly given his horse so that the healed knight could promote spiritual ideals by his knightly activities. But Lancelot thinks only of his own needs, believing that this knight has injured him and immediately seeks vengeance and he wounds the knight. He has demonstrated that he continues to operate on a worldly, rather than spiritual, plane.

Second, Lancelot is asked to show that he can identify correctly a group of spiritual knights when they are fighting a group of worldly knights. His next testing ground is the tournament field. The five hundred knights competing in the tournament are divided into two groups. The black knights were from the castle itself, whereas the white knights come from elsewhere. Lancelot decides to join the black knights because they appeared to be the weaker party (931.24). Although Lancelot performs many great feats of arms, he becomes exhausted and is eventually led away by the white knights into the forest where he was kept as their prisoner. Lancelot's defeat comes on his most familiar territory, the tournament ground, where he has never been beaten (932.16-17). Falling asleep, this time under an apple tree, Lancelot has another vision. An old man comes to him and asks why his faith and belief are so easily turned away from God and towards the world (932.27-28).

A female hermit explains his vision. The black knights were those who had undertaken the Grail quest without confession, whereas the white knights were those who lived in either a state of virginity or were chaste (933.22-29). The black knights were defeated

because they lived in a state of sin and Lancelot, in his pride and love of worldly rewards, choose to defend them (933.31-934.1). He did not read the spiritual signals correctly. The hermit warns him that if he does not learn the spiritual lessons each of these adventures has given him, he will be overcome by any spiritual knight in any battle he undertakes and to lose his honour in the world: he will be placing his soul at risk of damnation also (934.17). Having, yet again, failed his spiritual tests, Lancelot comes to a river where a man as black as a berry kills Lancelot's horse with a single thrust of his spear (934.30-935.1). But his willingness to try to learn is shown when he thanks God for this adventure (935.3-4). He has no choice but to wait by the river until he receives further education in the ways of spiritual chivalry.

### **Lancelot's Spiritual Rehabilitation**

Lancelot has failed to put the ideals of spiritual chivalry into practice, and is therefore no longer allowed to operate as a knight, now that he does not have a horse. He lies down to sleep because it is only in this state of unconsciousness, where he is no longer aware of worldly temptations, that he accesses the spiritual realm. Lancelot's conscious decision to seek spiritual advice through his dream world is rewarded because an old man comes to him and commands him to take up his armour and enter the first ship he finds on the river (1011.6-7). Upon awakening, Lancelot follows this command and shows that he is developing greater spiritual awareness by crossing himself (1011.8-10). And he is duly rewarded for this obedience and thanks God for placing him in such a state of joy that it surpassed all the joy that he might experience in the world (1011.17-18). That night Lancelot discovers that he is in the ship where the body of Perceval's sister lies on her final journey to the city of Sarras, and finding a letter in her hand he reads of all the adventures of the knights who have proven themselves worthy to join the Grail fellowship.

Lancelot has finally entered into a state of grace, which is revealed because the land supplies every thing he needs (1011.30). This tests his obedience to spiritual ideals, because this sustenance received from the land is compared to the manna received by the

Israelites in the wilderness after they had escaped from their servitude in Egypt (1011.28). In Exodus 16:4 God says to Moses:

I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.<sup>17</sup>

Lancelot, who had previously been compared to the fruitless fig tree that could not feed Christ on the road near the city of Bethany, now receives the spiritual fruits of heaven itself. While he lives in faith and obedience, all his worldly needs are sustained by the spiritual world. If he can maintain this faith, he will continue to receive this bounty. However, Lancelot's difficulties in maintaining this obedience are shown when he grows weary of the ship and steps onto the land (1011.31-1012.1). Lancelot's lack of spiritual resolve is clearly shown. His weariness or boredom of the ship is in direct contrast to scriptural teachings on endurance such as 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3:

Grace be to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for you all; making a remembrance of you in our prayers without ceasing. Being mindful of the work of your faith, and labour, and charity, and in the enduring of the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ before God and our Father.<sup>18</sup>

Lancelot needs to learn that he must always keep spiritual matters at the forefront of his mind to receive the blessings of the Grail.

Lancelot's willingness to attempt to live a spiritual life is rewarded when, at this moment, he meets Galahad and they acknowledge each other as father and son. But Lancelot demonstrates his humility by handing the mantle of being the best knight in the world to Galahad. He does this by kneeling before Galahad and asking for his blessing (1012.18). Lancelot shows that he understands how far he has moved away from spiritual ideals. He signifies the fallen state of humankind.<sup>19</sup> Lancelot and Galahad spend six months together

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<sup>17</sup> In the Latin, 'ecce ego pluam vobis panes de caelo egrediatur populus et colligat quae sufficient per singulos dies'.

<sup>18</sup> In the Latin, 'gratius agimus Deo semper pro omnibus vobis memoriam facientis in orationibus nostris sine intermissione memores operas fidei vestrae et laboris et caritatis et sustinentiae spei Domini nostri Iesu Christi anti Deum et Patrum nostrum'.

<sup>19</sup> If this description of Lancelot's time with Galahad is read against 1 Corinthians 15:22, the analogy widens and it becomes a description of the displacement of Arthurian chivalry by

where Lancelot is given the opportunity to learn how to live life in the spirit in the company of his son, the exemplary spiritual knight.<sup>20</sup> But their differing paths in the Grail quest are emphasized because they separate, and Lancelot's destiny is confirmed. He is to return to Arthur's court where he can be an example of a life lived in the spirit can also live in the world. How successfully he fulfils his destiny becomes one of the central issues of the final books of the *Morte Darthur*.

Having received this final spiritual instruction, Lancelot comes to his final test in the Grail quest where his prayer to see something of the Grail is answered. (1014.6). What this next episode depicting Lancelot's trials at the Grail Castle demonstrates is that despite all the spiritual instruction Lancelot has received, he instinctively continues to place his faith in worldly ideals. For example, when he arrives at Castle Corbenic, his old impulsive reaction to his own self-defence rears its ugly head as he draws his sword at the sight of two lions at the gate (1014.16-20). But his spiritual progress is also shown when after a voice admonishes him for placing his faith in his own prowess rather than in God, Lancelot shows his contrition by thanking God for the spiritual lesson (1014.21-28). He comes to the door of the Grail chamber, which he attempts to force open but upon hearing a voice inside saying 'Joy and honoure be to the Fadir in Hevyn' (1015.7), he realizes that he has arrived in a sacred place and kneels to pray for mercy. He asks that he may be given a glimpse of the Grail despite his sins (1015.11-14). The door opens to show Lancelot the truth of the Grail but even this moment becomes a test of Lancelot's obedience to the will of God. He is instructed not to enter the room in which the Grail ceremony is to occur but, again, Lancelot's impulsive reactions demonstrate that he has not fully understood these lessons. He enters the room in order to help the priest at the Mass when an image of three men forms above the priest's hands. Lancelot's desire to help the priest demonstrates that he still places his faith in his own prowess rather than trusting that God will sustain the priest (1016.5-6).

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spiritual chivalry. Lancelot can be read as Adam, as Galahad is read as Christ. In the Latin, 'et sicut in Adam omnes moriuntur ita et in Christo omnes vivificabuntur'. In the English, 'and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive'.

<sup>20</sup> Mahoney, 'The Truest and Holiest Tale', 119.

A hot breath causes Lancelot to fall to the ground as punishment for disobeying the command not to enter the room. He loses all sense of sight and of hearing (1016.7-13) and remains in this state for twenty-four days, a day for each year in which he has lived in a state of sin (1017.16-18). When he finally awakes, Lancelot laments that he has been thrown back into the world because, in his unconscious state, he has been in the presence of Christ, an experience so marvellous that he can neither explain it nor think about it (1017.6-12). As Dosanjh argues, in the Grail castle Lancelot's divided self is shown once more as he continues to follow worldly ideals rather than the spiritual ideals he followed during his time with Galahad in the wilderness. Therefore he is punished because he has demonstrated by his actions at the Grail ceremony that he is not ready to enter heaven and he is forced to awaken from his comatose state and re-enter the world after his glimpse of the Grail and the glory of God.<sup>21</sup> Lancelot demonstrates that he understands why he cannot remain in this state of bliss because he is a sinner, and he chooses to continue his penance by continuing to wear the hair shirt of the holy man (1017.28-29).

But Lancelot is rewarded for his efforts because he discovers that he is amongst old friends, King Pelles and his court, and the Grail honours Lancelot as a shining example of a knight of the world and he does enjoy the fruits of the Grail in its worldly form. There is a feast of all the good foods that any could think of (1018.29-31). Lancelot's achievement in the Grail quest is further highlighted when his brother, Sir Ector de Marys, is denied access to this feast (1019.9-13). This particular Grail feast is a significant moment for Lancelot because it shows that spiritual forces have nominated him as the best knight of the world. Ector's exclusion further highlights how far other knights of the Round Table are removed from the ideals of the Grail and spiritual chivalry. Whereas Lancelot has proved to be deserving of the gifts of the Grail in their earthly form, Ector is denied access to that feast, even though all knights received that particular gift before they set out on the Grail quest.

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<sup>21</sup> Kate Dosanjh, 'Rest in Peace, Lancelot's Spiritual Journey in *Le Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana* 16, (1986), 63-67, 64.

Lancelot returns to Arthur's court and learns from Bors that Galahad asks him to remind Lancelot that this is a dangerous world (1036.28). Galahad hopes that his father has become more stable in his devotion to a life lived in the spirit rather than the world. Although his adventures in the *Sangreal* have taught him that he must trust God to remain safe, Lancelot is confronted by the temptations of the court and it is not long before he forgets the promise in the Grail quest and recommences his affair with Guinever (1045.10-2). However Lancelot's spiritual potential is seen again in *The Healing of Sir Urry*. It is believed that Malory composed this tale. The dangers of worldly chivalry are made explicit in this tale when a knight killed by Urry places an enchantment upon him, whereby his wounds to his head, body and left hand will never heal until they are examined and treated by the best knight in the world (1145.18-20). Sir Urry's own mother and his sister carry him on a litter throughout the Christian world to find the knight who will cure him.

There are two elements of this story that relate directly to the *Sangreal*. First, the reader is told that the motivation for Urry's battle is firmly steeped in the ideals of worldly chivalry. Sir Urry and Sir Alpheus battle each other, as each is envious of the other's prowess and knightly skills (1145.9). Both knights act out of a desire to prove that one is a better knight than the other. Second, this scenario mirrors Lancelot's vision of the Grail ceremony when he is asleep by the cross and sees the sick knight healed within the chapel he could not enter in the *Sangreal* (894.9-32). This is the same knight Lancelot later wounds again when he takes back his horse, having forgotten the ideals of spiritual chivalry and allowing his own worldly passions to overtake him. This echo back to the *Sangreal* becomes a metaphor for the damage caused by knights who use their knightly skills for their own benefit, without considering the effects this violence will have on the wider community. The *Tale of Sir Urry* shows is that these wounds can be healed only with recourse to spiritual ideals.<sup>22</sup> Where this episode differs from the *Sangreal* is that Malory emphasizes that the mantle of the best knight in the world does not necessarily

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<sup>22</sup> Radulescu, "Now I Take Upon Me the Adventures to Seke of Holy Things": Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood', 293. Radulescu argues that Arthur understands that religion is an important part of chivalry, so that the healing of Sir Urry is far more than another test of Lancelot's virtue.

belong to a Grail knight because Bors fails to heal Sir Urry (1148.70).<sup>23</sup> Other qualities are required.

Urry and his entourage arrive at the court of Arthur during the feast of Pentecost, emphasizing that this is another opportunity for the spiritual renewal of the court (1145.32). The knights of the Round Table, except those who like Lancelot are currently on an adventure, have gathered together. Arthur assures Urry's mother that if it is possible a Christian man will heal him (1146.23-24). All the knights, including Arthur fail to heal Urry as they search his wounds (1147.18-1148.32). Lancelot who serendipitously returns from his adventures demonstrates that he has learned the spiritual lessons of the Grail quest because he agrees only to attempt to heal Urry because Arthur has commanded him to do so. He explains his reticence in the following statement:

'My moste renowned lorde,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'I know well I dare nat, nor may nat, disobey you. But and I myght or durste, wyte you well I wolde nat take upon me to towche that wounded knight in that entent that I shulde passe all other knyghtes. Jesu defende me frome that shame!' (1151.26-29).

Lancelot has learned from his experiences in the Grail quest that to become the best knight in the world is a gift from God.<sup>24</sup> If he is to attempt to heal Sir Urry he must have the right motivation in his heart because he will fail if he does this because he wishes to have honour in the world. Lancelot must approach this task as an instrument of God's mercy.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bradstock argues that Lancelot's ability to heal Urry is a reminder of how the Arthurian civilization might have progressed if Lancelot could have embraced all the ideals associated with the Grail. Margaret Bradstock, 'The Juxtaposition of *The Knight of the Cart* and *The Healing of Sir Urry*', in *AUMLA* 50 (1978), 208-223, 221.

<sup>24</sup> Tucker argues that this episode demonstrates that Malory sees Lancelot as under an obligation to conform to Christian standards of conduct. When he deviates from these standards by recommencing his affair with Guinever, his healing of Urry shows that although he remains a sinner, he is the best knight in the world. P.E. Tucker, 'The Place of the Quest of the Holy Grail in the *Morte Darthur*', in *Modern Language Review* 48 (1953), 391-397, 396.

<sup>25</sup> Falcetta, 'The Enduring Sacred Strain: The Place of the *Tale of the Sankgreal* within Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*', 21-34. Falcetta says that although, by this point in the *Morte Darthur*, Lancelot has slipped back into his affair with Guinever, his devotion to God has never wavered.

The key to Lancelot's success is his belief that he is not worthy enough to succeed (1152.14-15) following the many humiliations he suffered in the Grail quest. To reiterate this point, Lancelot prays before he begins this task asking God, Christ and the Holy Ghost for the power to heal Urry, knowing that he will only be healed by divine grace (1152.20-25). After he has succeeded Lancelot weeps like a child who has been beaten (1152.36), but these tears are perhaps tears of joy for a man who has endured such changing fortune in such humiliating circumstances as he experienced in the Grail quest. He has regained his former position as the best knight in the world but this has occurred because he has publicly announced his reliance upon God.<sup>26</sup> He has been beaten like a child, duly punished because of his failure to recognize the debt he owes God, and he has shown now that he has learned the lessons of his punishment well.

Lancelot's success in the *Healing of Sir Urry* leads to a spiritual renewal of the entire court because the king and all the knights give thanks to God (1152.33-37). Urry is accepted into the court with a present of new clothes and there is a tournament in which Urry proves to be a knight of great prowess. All seems well at the court of Arthur, until Malory reminds the reader that Sir Aggravayne, like the serpent in the garden of Eden, lies in wait, ready to denounce Lancelot and Guinever for their affair (1153.32-35). What the *Sangreal* has shown is that Lancelot's passion for Guinever has implications that go far beyond the personal. This affair is the catalyst for the coming storm that will destroy Arthurian civilization, and in spiritual terms, the sin that made Lancelot so unstable and divided his loyalties between worldly ideals and spiritual ideals are a direct result of Lancelot's failure to embrace all the learning he received in the Grail quest when he returned to the court. This chapter ends on a particularly ominous note.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Although it may seem as if Lancelot's healing of Urry does equate him with the healing acts of the Grail knights, Benson demonstrates an important distinction. Lancelot is reaffirmed as the greatest knight in the world when Urry is healed but at no point in this episode is an attempt made to reach a spiritual union with God. Furthermore, Urry's wounds are of a physical, rather than spiritual, nature, thereby reiterating that Arthur's court remains firmly in the material world. C. David Benson, 'The ending of the *Morte Darthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, *Arthurian Studies* 37 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), 221-238, 229.

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy states that the *Book of Lancelot and Guinever* also ends with Lancelot being depicted as a healer and holy man, a picture that remains in the mind of the reader when Mordred and Aggravayne accuse him of adultery. Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*, 304.

This spiritual renewal has come too late to save the Arthurian civilization. Arthur's court will become entrapped in a cycle of civil war, forcing Lancelot and Bors, the only two knights who have had any measure of success in the Grail quest, to leave for their own lands in France. When the final battle begins between Arthur and Mordred, Lancelot remains in France and, when he is told of the war with Mordred by letter from the dying Gawain, he cannot come to England in time to prevent the final destruction (1234.16-19).<sup>28</sup> Divided loyalties within the court have left it vulnerable to attack.

Guinever, seeing Lancelot after Arthur has died of his wounds and living as a nun in Amesbury, is the first to acknowledge that their affair has led to the destruction of Arthur's court (1252.8-11). Lancelot acknowledges also that if he had forsaken his love of Guinever, which made him a slave to the world, as he did in the *Sangreal*, he would have surpassed all the knights of the world except Galahad (1253.13-17). He promises to spend the rest of his life in penance and prayer living with a hermit (1253.23-25). Lancelot shows that he has learned his spiritual lessons well. He rides until he comes to a chapel, hears mass said by the Bishop of Canterbury and willingly goes to confession before joining the religious brotherhood (1254.13-18). In essence, Lancelot leaves the worldly fellowship of the Round Table for the spiritual fellowship of a religious order, where many other former knights of the Round Table join him and also exchange their knightly armour for a religious habit. Thus, in the wake of devastation and destruction, Lancelot leads the remaining knights away from their worldly lives into the spiritual life. What could not be achieved in the *Sangreal*, when the knights were offered great rewards for discarding their desire for worldly rewards, is now achieved and the new religious fellowship live in peace.

The lessons learned in his Grail journey continue to haunt Lancelot and when he visits the grave of Arthur and Guinever at Glastonbury he reiterates his sin again:

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<sup>28</sup> Kelly argues that Lancelot attempts to prevent the onset of civil war between Gawain and himself is demonstrated by his peace initiative when he offers to found chantries on behalf of the souls of Gareth and Gaherys. Robert L Kelly, 'Penitence as a Remedy for War in Malory's *Tale of the Death of King Arthur*', *Studies in Philology* 91 (1994), 111-135, 111.

Also whan I remembre me how by my defaute and myn orgule and my pryde that they were bothe layed ful lowe, that were pereles that ever was lyvyng of Cristen people (1256.32-35).

Lancelot blames himself for their troubles and deaths. He understands that his own desires and passions were the instruments of destruction and he continues to undertake a penance by eating such small amounts of food and taking very little drink that he compromises his health as he lies at the tomb (1257.1-2).

The description of Lancelot's death proves that he has finally achieved the peace he desperately seeks. The Bishop of Canterbury reports that he saw him in a vision surrounded by angels in heaven (1258.7-10). The glory of this vision is so great that the bishop is annoyed that he has been woken up because being in heaven with Lancelot had made him merrier and more peaceful than he had ever been in his life (1254.4-5). Accordingly Lancelot's final lesson of the *Sangreal* is repeated. Any man who is a sinner is always unhappy in this world, but if he repents and achieves salvation he will know happiness beyond their wildest imaginings. Lancelot, whose life straddled the two extremes of worldly and spiritual chivalry, knew the best and the worst of both these ideals. He experienced the pain and suffering of love and loss in the world, as well as the exhilaration of spiritual ecstasy and the suffering of penance. Having proven that he could live a life of penance following the destruction of all that he loved, Lancelot finally achieves his true reward. That is, the happiness and peace of salvation following physical death in the world, a state he could not achieve whilst he was tempted by the physical desires of the court and by the honour and renown he received from his knightly prowess. It was his status as a knight that kept him firmly locked in the ideals of worldly chivalry, and as a consequence, alienated from the ideals of spiritual chivalry. The spiritual biographies of the four knights, Perceval, Bors, Galahad and Lancelot, demonstrate how far Arthurian civilization had strayed from spiritual ideals. The final biography, investigating Arthur's kingship from a spiritual point of view, shows how Arthurian civilization became so alienated from spiritual ideals.

## Chapter Six Arthur: King of All Britain

And I, according to my cople, have doon sette it in enprynte to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyll and vertuuous dedes that somme knyghtes used in tho dayes, by whyche they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punyssed and ofte put to shame and rebuke.<sup>253</sup>

### Introduction

Although Arthur only appears briefly in Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal*, I would argue that an analysis of his role as king within this tale reveals how far removed Arthurian civilization has become from its divine purpose. In the middle ages it was believed that God gave the kingdom to an individual as king and that the purpose of this kingship was to administer justice to all. The king could do this in the following ways, first, by rewarding the good, second, by protecting the weak, third, by punishing sinners, and last, by showing mercy to the repentant. In essence, the role of the king was to maintain the laws of God, and to do this effectively, he had to care for both the bodies and souls of all his subjects. The king, therefore, was under the same obligations as the knights because the kingdom was not to be used for the king's own profit or enjoyment, it was to be used to promote the common good, or to become a commonwealth. To ensure that the kingdom was a commonwealth, the king's role was to defend the kingdom against enemies, to reinforce law and order, and to ensure his subjects lived virtuous lives to sustain stability and social harmony.<sup>254</sup>

This chapter argues that when Arthur was first identified as king by divine command, his role as the protector and defender of the commonwealth was clearly laid out before him, but because of the circumstances of his birth and his own desire to guarantee that there was no opposition to his rule, he is unable to fulfil this divine contract. His failure to do so, created, at the beginning of the *Morte Darthur*, the conditions that would lead to the

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<sup>253</sup> Caxton, 'Caxton's Preface', cxlv.

<sup>254</sup> G.L. Harriss, 'The King and His Subjects' in *Fifteenth Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England*, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13-28, 13.

destruction of Arthur civilization. Looking at the role of Arthur from this point of view, it is possible to read the *Sangreal* as a critique of Arthur's chivalric ideals because it draws attention to another discourse that can be detected in the earlier books when the reader has an understanding of the *Sangreal's* spiritual ideals of chivalry. To do this effectively, the ideals of chivalry, as they are presented in the *Sangreal*, must be applied to the actions of the knights in the first chapter in the first book of the *Morte Darthur*, *Merlin*, to examine how the chivalric ideals of the Arthurian court developed and to analyse why a new order of chivalry is required to demonstrate the inadequacies of Arthurian chivalry. The new spiritual ideals of the Grail quest demand that the knights displace allegiance to Arthur in favour of an absolute allegiance to Christ to prevent the destruction of Arthurian civilization. When the *Merlin* is read from this point of view, it is possible to see that Arthur has been problematized rather than praised throughout the *Morte Darthur*. Even though at the conclusion of his war with the Emperor Lucius the pope will crown him emperor over Christendom (245.7), seemingly as an acknowledgment that Arthur is a king who is favoured by God, the successful Grail knights have learned to redirect their primary allegiance away from Arthur.<sup>255</sup> His flawed ideals lead to death and destruction. The successful Grail knights place their allegiance in the hands of Christ, where chivalric ideals lead to peace and the reinstatement of a Christian commonwealth in Sarras.

Arthur's story reveals the deep chasm that lies between the worldly ideals of the Arthurian court and the ideals of the Grail. Eugène Vinaver's claim in his edition of the Malory manuscript published in 1947 that the Grail story offered the knights of the Round Table an opportunity to achieve even greater glory in this world, rather than in the next world, must be disputed.<sup>256</sup> The Grail demands a complete revision of the Arthurian chivalric ideals if the knights are to be successfully complete the Grail quest. Yes, Bors's and Lancelot's kudos at the Arthurian court is greatly increased when they return from the Grail quest but this ignores that fact that the hero of the quest, Galahad, does not

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<sup>255</sup> In the *Healing of Sir Urry*, for instance, Arthur is described as 'My moste noble crystynd kyng' by the wounded knight (1147.14). I would argue that, in both cases, this judgment is made by worldly authority without the benefit of the spiritual testing that the Grail knights endure before they are invited to join the Grail fellowship in the *Sangreal*.

<sup>256</sup> Vinaver as quoted in Malory's *Works*, 1535.

return, and that his only involvement in Arthurian chivalry occurs when he proves his superior physical prowess on the tournament field at Camelot in the *Departure* (864.28-33).

Throughout the entire tale Galahad is always a knight of Christ who adheres totally to a model of chivalry that knights such as Lancelot, Gawain and, importantly, Arthur find foreign and often unfathomable. When Galahad commits an act of violence, there are definite benefits to the community as evildoers are removed and peace is restored as Christian values are reintroduced. In contrast, in the first book of the *Morte Darthur*, *Merlin*, the first chapter demonstrates that Arthur's overriding concern during the first wars of his reign is to establish his own position as the undoubted king of England. In fact, this first chapter can be understood as Arthur's estrangement from God because he lets his desire for domination over all the subjects of the land override the divine purpose of his kingship.

When Arthur removes the sword from the stone, he shows that he is king by divine command, but when this kingship is threatened by the internal division of the nobles, Arthur's own reactions show that he is driven by his desire to rule and not by a desire to create peace and harmony within the land. Having fallen away from the divine purpose of his kingship, Arthur makes decisions and commits acts that further alienate him from those who would support him. Therefore Galahad's chivalric exploits in the *Sangreal* present a striking contrast to Arthur's chivalric exploits in *Merlin*. Whereas Galahad's chivalric exploits always promote peace and a return to Christian values, Arthur creates and maintains internal dissent and division by the choices he makes when confronted by a situation that could lead to violence. In short, where Galahad promotes peace and healing, Arthur creates wounding and rupture.

Although Arthur's appearance in the *Sangreal* is so brief that it can be easily overlooked, when his story is read from the wider position of the *Morte Darthur* the reforming agenda of the Grail quest comes into full view. How the court of Arthur became trapped in the morass of worldly chivalry can be fully grasped only when *Merlin* is read from the

perspective of the ideals of spiritual chivalry as they are presented by Galahad's knightly exploits in the *Sangreal*. This examination shows that Arthur's concern for the maintenance of his own kingship outweighs any concern for his subjects. A clear picture of Arthur's role in the *Sangreal* cannot be gained unless he is read from the larger context of the entire *Morte Darthur* where the parallels with Galahad's story serve to expose his deficiencies.<sup>257</sup>

### **How Arthur's Conception Impacts on his Kingship**

It is difficult to imagine that Arthur could have taken to anything other than worldly ideals given the circumstances of his conception. The opening chapter of the *Morte Darthur* (1-56) begins with a description of the depth of adulterous feeling Arthur's father and the previous king of England, Uther Pendragon, felt for the wife of the Duke of Cornwall:

The kinge lyked and loved this lady wel, and he made them grete chere out of mesure and desyred to have lyen by her (7.9-11).

Arthur is conceived in circumstances in which Uther Pendragon's desire for physical pleasure outweighs his consideration for the common good of the kingdom. In short, when Igraine, the wife of Cornwall, initially refuses Uther, his desire for her leads to an escalation of the war between the Duke of Cornwall and the King of England. When this episode is read against the predominant ideals of spiritual chivalry as they are presented in the *Sangreal*, this war is bound irrefutably in worldly ideals because it is motivated by lechery.<sup>258</sup>

The story of Arthur's conception invokes the Old Testament story of David and Bathsheba.<sup>259</sup> Thus the story of Uther and Igraine, when the episode is read against the story of David and Bathsheba, serves to condemn Uther and to problematize Arthur. David, like Uther, allows his lust to cloud his decision-making ability, and like Uther, the end result of David's lust will be the death of the object of the lust's husband. In the

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<sup>257</sup> Kelly, 'Arthur, Galahad and the Scriptural Pattern in Malory', 12-14.

<sup>258</sup> Lynch, "'Thou Woll Never Have Done'", Ideology, Context and Excess in Malory's War', 28.

<sup>259</sup> See 2 Samuel 11.

biblical story, the consequences of this lust is clearly spelt out by the prophet, Nathan, in 2 Samuel 12: 9-10:

Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.<sup>260</sup>

This parallel establishes that a state of war that is not quickly and decisively resolved designates an estrangement from God and spiritual ideals. The ultimate outcome of any battle fought under the ideals of spiritual chivalry is a timely and swift resolution leading to peace. Those who practise the ideals of spiritual chivalry, fighting a battle only if it complies with the will of God, will have victory because the battle will benefit the entire community by removing evildoers and returning the community to Christian principles. Therefore the parallel between the story of David's adulterous love for Bathsheba and Uther's adulterous love for Igraine demonstrates Uther's distance from spiritual chivalry and the result is a continuous state of war while Uther and his descendents remain on the throne.

This estrangement from God can be explored in the light of the nature of Uther's desire for Igraine. This desire is expressed as being beyond the bounds of what is reasonable because he is described as attempting to entertain Igraine and her husband in a manner that is 'out of measure' (7.11). When Igraine refuses his advances and leaves Camelot with her husband, Uther is described as being 'wonderly wroth' (7.22). He has fallen into an excess of emotion, which has undermined one of the four cardinal virtues.<sup>261</sup> He has not considered his actions in the light of temperance.<sup>262</sup> In essence, what began as lust has

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<sup>260</sup> In the Latin, 'quare ergo contempsisti verbum Domini ut faceres maum in conspectus meo Uriah Hettheum percussisti gladio filiorum Ammon quam ob rem non recedet gladius de domo tua usque in sempiternum eo quod despexeris me et tuleris uxorem Uriae Hetthei ut esset uxor tua'.

<sup>261</sup> Morton W. Bloomfield lists the four cardinal virtues as fortitude, prudence, temperance, and justice. The virtues are identified by Cicero and can be traced back to Plato. In the medieval period they are combined with the three Christian virtues, faith, hope and charity. See Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 66.

<sup>262</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, "'Oute of Measure", Violence and Knighthood in Malory's Morte

now turned to anger, and this anger will drive the decisions made in the war against the Duke of Cornwall. Therefore the *Morte Darthur* begins with an emphasis on the intention behind any act of violence, and the text overall proceeds to judge whether this act is justified or unjustified by this intention.<sup>263</sup>

Uther's lust and anger, which he says is caused by his love of Igraine, result in him becoming sick and no longer being whole, or healthy (8.10-12). It seems as if Uther has turned these destructive emotions in upon himself. In this state he is unable to govern the kingdom and responsibility is turned over to his vassals and advisors. It is significant that Malory uses the word 'whole' to describe a state of wellness or, when used antithetically, sickness to describe the effect of Uther's lust and anger. This word certainly connects Uther's predicament to the *Sangreal*. Felicity Riddy argues that a word play based upon the concept of wholeness runs throughout the *Sangreal* and the word itself comes in the following forms: hole 'wholly'; hole 'whole, healthy'; holy 'holy.' Issues of health are no longer purely physical matters and have now come to denote a state of spiritual engagement with God.

In the first chapter of the *Sangreal, the Departure*, Arthur cherishes the wholeness or unity created in the Round Table when Galahad takes the Siege Perillous at the beginning of the *Sangreal*, but regrets the loss of this unity as the knights leave Camelot in pursuit of a vision of the holy, or as it is known in this context, the Grail.<sup>264</sup> Realizing that the Round Table will never be unified again in its current form Arthur announces a tournament to celebrate the soon to be lost unity:

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Darthur', in *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur, Texts and Contexts Characters and Themes*, ed. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, *Arthurian Studies* 60 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 119-132, 122.

<sup>263</sup> Christopher Cannon, 'Malory's Crime, Chivalric Identity and Evil Will' in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry, Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. David Aers (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 159-183, 164. Cannon argues that Malory's intention in the *Morte Darthur* is to examine criminal acts and how these acts are incorporated in the text. He analyses how the fifteenth-century legal concept of *mens rea*, or the concealment of a bad intention marks a knight's action as being either good or evil. An examination of this concept within the light of spiritual chivalry denotes *mens rea* as any act that is conducted for one's own benefit without thought of any benefit to the community.

<sup>264</sup> Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, 116.

‘Now,’ seyde the kynge, ‘I am sure at this quest of the Sankegreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne holé togydirs, therefore ones shall I se togydir in the medow, all holé togydirs! Therefore I woll se you all holé togydir in the medow of Camelot, to juste and to turney, that aftir youre dethe men may speke of hit that such good knyghtes were here, such a day holé togydir (864.5-12).

Within this statement as Arthur emphasizes his concept of the Round Table being ‘whole’ he demonstrates that the wholeness he values is based upon knights who perform individual acts of prowess and as such win much worldly glory. In essence he promotes a vision of worldly chivalry that alienates the knights of the Round Table from the ideals of spiritual chivalry. Therefore the Round Table is broken up as individual knights go in search of another vision of wholeness based upon the values of the Grail. They are required to demonstrate that their focus has moved from their pursuit of individual glory to a focus based upon their desire to benefit the entire community as they obey the will of God.

Returning to the *Merlin*, Uther’s lack of wholeness, or his spiritual sickness, manifested in his lust for the wife of his enemy, can be read as a marker of his alienation from spiritual ideals. He has become sick because of his desire for the things of the world, impairing his judgment in a crisis as his army besieges the Duke’s army in the Castle of Terrabyll (8.2-7). The solution to Uther’s sickness caused by his lust, when Merlin changes Uther’s appearance to that of the Duke of Cornwall in order that he can sleep with Igraine, not only ends in the conception of Arthur but also in the death of the Duke of Cornwall (9.14-23). The opening episode of the *Morte Darthur* gives a prime example of unjustified war because it shows how one individual’s desire creates violence. When the episode is read against Bernard of Clairvaux’s description of the causes of war in worldly chivalry in his treatise *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, Uther’s war against the Duke of Cornwall is seen to be motivated by two necessary conditions. It is motivated by unreasonable flashes of anger, by the thirst for empty glory and by the hankering after some earthly possession.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, the outcome of this war is an escalation of

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<sup>265</sup> Clairvaux, ‘In Praise of the New Knighthood’, 133. In the Latin, ‘non sane aliud inter vos bella movet litesque suscitatur, nisi aut irrationabilis iracundiae motus, aut inanis gloriae appetitus, aut

hostilities throughout the land, confirming that Uther's actions have provoked an unjust war and the consequences of this particular scenario plagues Arthur throughout his reign. Arthur has been brought into a world in which his own father's actions and decisions have alienated him from the will of God.

As the *Merlin* is read as a critique of Arthurian chivalry, the parallels between Arthur's first appearances in the *Morte Darthur* and Galahad's first appearance in the *Sangreal* become apparent. Both first appearances are surrounded by spiritual mystery and symbolism, indicating that both Arthur and Galahad are entering the *Morte Darthur* as agents of spiritual ideals. But their individual stories separate them because, as Galahad remains true to the spiritual ideals, Arthur, throughout *Merlin*, drifts away from these ideals and becomes enmeshed in worldly ideals. Significantly both are kings, Arthur in Camelot and Galahad in Sarras but the object that lies at the centre of the mysterious signs as they take their respective thrones distinguishes the major focus of their kingship. Whereas Galahad is surrounded by signs that designate the coming of the Holy Grail to Camelot as a vessel of peace, Arthur's kingship is announced by his ability to remove a sword, a weapon of war, from a stone that has miraculously appeared in a churchyard in London. The focus of Galahad's rule in the mysterious city of Sarras is designated by spiritual ideals as it is articulated through the Grail, while the focus of Arthur's kingship is to heal the rifts created in society by the actions and death of Uther through the use of a sword.

Arthur will bring peace to the kingdom if he overcomes any opposition by force and removes any elements that threatened its stability. But, if he is to be successful, he must prove that he is motivated by a desire to bring benefit to the entire community and not from his own passions and worldly desires. Although signs designating his reign as a period of peace and unity surround the coming of Arthur, he strays from spiritual ideals as he attempts to unify his kingdom and establish his rule. A close analysis of the *Merlin* shows the gap between the ideals of spiritual chivalry and the ideals of worldly chivalry and reveals why, as I am arguing, the *Sangreal* is the ideological heart of the *Morte*

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terrenae qualiscumque possessionis cupiditas (58)?

*Darthur*. It introduces a reforming agenda that is required because the ideals of spiritual chivalry were discarded so early in the reign of Arthur as he became so thoroughly enmeshed in the morass of worldly chivalry.

### **Arthur Enthroned by the Miraculous**

Arthur does face enormous difficulties at the beginning of his reign, inherited from his father, Uther. Even though the death of the Duke of Cornwall means that Uther can marry Igraine, making Arthur his legitimate heir, his unreasonable lust and anger have produced lasting damage to his reign. The stability of the kingdom is compromised further as Uther develops more illnesses and violence develops as various vassals attempt to usurp the throne (11.17-19). Although his presence on the battlefield, even while he is sick, encourages his faithful followers to defeat his enemies, Uther soon dies after naming Arthur, now fostered by Sir Ector, as his heir (12.5-8). After Uther's death, the effects of his lust and anger on the kingdom are explored because the kingdom is described as being in great jeopardy as many of the great lords attempt to usurp the throne through their military might (12.11-13). Having shown how destructive the deals of worldly chivalry are to the kingdom as a whole, a solution to this disunity is sought through the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

A return to spiritual ideals is heralded when Merlin turns to the Archbishop of Canterbury to summon all the knights together at Christmas.<sup>266</sup> What is signified is that a new age is dawning when a great king will emerge to reunite and bring peace to the kingdom.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury's role in the *Merlin* as the bringer of spiritual ideals to the kingdom can be contrasted with his actions at the end of the *Morte Darthur* when he excommunicates the kingdom after Mordred has usurped the throne in the *Day of Destiny* (1228.5-13). This parallel clearly shows that if the will of God is disregarded, the kingdom will be destroyed. G.L. Harriss argues that the king was subject to the judgment of God and that he could be replaced if he became a tyrant, or a king who ruled for his own profit. See 'The King and His Subjects', 14.

<sup>267</sup> As the heavenly host of angels announce to the shepherds in Luke 2:14, the purpose of the Christ coming into the world is, in the Latin, 'Gloria in altissimis Deo et in terra pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis'. In the English, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men to men of good will'. The idea that the sword in the stone's appearance on Christmas Day is an announcement of a new era of peace is confirmed in the *Golden Legend*. In the explanation of the meaning of Christmas found in *The Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to the Flesh* it

This task will not be placed in the hands of men because the true king will be announced by a miracle (12.19). And so, after Matins on Christmas Day when the great barons of the land are assembled at the greatest church in London, the famed sword in the stone appears in the churchyard. Its purpose is announced in letters of gold:

WHOSO PULLETH OUTE THIS SWERD OF THIS STONE AND ANVYLD IS  
RIGHTWYS KYNGE BORNE OF ALL EN<G>LOND (12.34-36).

Just as Galahad's right to the sword in the red marble stone and his right to the Sege Perillous is announced at the beginning of the *Sangreal* in the *Departure* by gold letters appearing on both objects, the right of the person who removes this sword from the stone to the throne of England is announced. In both cases, this right is established by miraculous means, denoting the spiritual nature of each of these tests.

All present in the churchyard on Christmas Day fail this particular spiritual test. The Archbishop announces that only divine intervention will decide who removes the sword from the stone (13.5). On New Year's Day the young Arthur arrives and easily removes the sword from the stone, firstly in private and then as it is witnessed by foster father, Ector and foster brother, Kay. Again the significance of the feast must be examined. New Year's Day, January 1<sup>st</sup>, is the Festival of Christ's Circumcision. The act of circumcision is a reminder of God's covenant with the nation of Israel first made with Abraham in Genesis 17. God promises Abraham that he will give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendents and in return Abraham and his descendants must keep the laws of God. In Old Testament terms circumcision is the outward sign of the covenant. Arthur's

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states, 'It was the Lord's will that since he was coming to give us peace in time and in eternity, temporal peace should lend lustre to the time of his birth'. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, I (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 37. All further references will be to this edition of the *Golden Legend*. In the Middle English, 'For as oure Lorde wolde be bore to yeue us euerlastin pees, right so [he] wolde that the tyme of pees schuld worship his natiuite'. See *Gilte Legende*, ed. Richard Hamer, I, Early English Text Society, OS 327 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.10-12. The *Gilte Legend* is a Middle English translation of Jean de Vignay's *Légend Dorée*, which was an Old French translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (or *Golden Legend*). There is a colophon in the D manuscript that says that a sinful wretch translated it from the French in 1438. See Editorial Procedures in this text, xi. All further translations of the *Golden Legend* in Middle English will be to this version of the text and will be found in the footnotes cited to page and line number.

removal of the sword in the stone is the outward sign that God has given him the right to rule the land. But a New Testament view of this event must also be considered because Paul in the letter to the Colossians 2:11 relates the circumcision of Christ to the keeping of a new Covenant of the New Testament:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of a sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with circumcision done by Christ.<sup>268</sup>

Arthur's removal of the sword in the stone on the Feast of the Circumcision has issued a spiritual challenge to the new king. In Old Testament terms, Arthur has indeed proven he is the rightful king of the land, but whether or not he can institute a new age of peace and stability will be tested throughout the early years of his kingship. What he must demonstrate is that he will only use violence to create unity and peace, and not to promote his own needs and desires. Arthur's challenge is to show that he will rule the kingdom according to the ideals of spiritual chivalry, thereby forgetting his own desires and passion that will drive him into the depths of worldly chivalry.<sup>269</sup> As king, Arthur must encourage all his subjects to abide by this new covenant. If anyone refuses they will be removed from the kingdom by violence of the divinely ordained king carrying the miraculous sword he removed from the stone.

The sword in the stone on New Year's Day or the Feast of the Circumcision signifies that Arthur has come to rule the land in accordance to the new covenant of Christ; and he must continually prove his right to the kingship by removing the sword again on all the major church festivals until Pentecost, when he is both knighted and crowned as king by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Each festival has a specific meaning that highlights the intended spiritual nature of Arthur's rule. On the twelfth day after Christmas, the Feast of Epiphany, Arthur is witnessed removing the sword from the stone by the barons of the

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<sup>268</sup> In the Latin, *in quo et circumcisi estis circumcissione non manufacta in expoliatione corporis caris in circumcissione Christi*.

<sup>269</sup> As the *Golden Legend* says, 'you are not, I say, circumcised with that circumcision, but the spiritual one which amputates all vices (75)'. In the *Gilte Legende*, 'also this the medicine [wher]of Seint Bernard saithe: 'This name Ihesus ys medicine, and re[f]reineth the strengthe of wratthe, yt appesith the bolnyng of pride, he helithe the woundes of enuye, he restreyneth the fere of lecherie, and it quencth the flame of coueitise, it attemperithe the thruste of auarice, and chasith oute all filthe and wrechidnesse (78.64-69)'.

land after the Archbishop again summons them to London. This particular feast commemorates four events in the life of Christ: first, the commemoration of the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus as found in Matthew 2:1-12; second, the commemoration of Christ's Baptism in the River Jordan by John the Baptist as found in Mark 1, Matthew 3 and Luke 3; third, the commemoration of the Christ's first miracle, when the water was turned into wine at the wedding at Cana as found in John 2:1-12; and fourth, the feeding of the five thousand with the loaves and fishes in Matthew 14: 13-21.<sup>270</sup> Each event depicts the manifestation of the divinity of Christ. As Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians 3: 10-11:

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>271</sup>

Arthur's divine mission as king to rule by the authority of God as it is revealed through Christ and made known to the world.

But, although the miraculous removal of the sword by Arthur represents the coming of a new spiritual order to the kingdom, division and resistance to this new order is revealed as well. The barons, who have previously agreed to accept the man who removes the sword as their king, are angry because Arthur is only a boy and his royal birthright as the son of Uther has not been revealed (15:22-25). Arthur must reveal his divine right to the kingship by removing the sword from the stone three more times, at Candlemas, at Easter and finally at Pentecost. The revelatory nature of the removal of the sword from the stone is glimpsed through the meaning of the festival of Candlemas, or the feast when Christ is presented to the Temple, is found in Luke 2:21-39. Christ was presented to temple authorities but only a righteous and devoted man named Simeon recognised that this is the messiah. He cried out that:

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<sup>270</sup> See the *Golden Legend*, (78). In the *Gilte Legende*, 'The Epiphanie of oure Lorde is worshipped by foure miracles, and therfor sche is named by foure names. For on this day the .iiij. kyngges comen whanne thei hadde sain the sterre fro the orient to worship oure Lorde in Bethelhem, Sainte Iohn baptised oure Lorde in the flode of Iordon and [the] water was turned into wyne, and he fedde .vM. men with .v. loues'.

<sup>271</sup> In the Latin, 'Ut innotescat principibus et potestatibus in caelestibus per ecclesiam multiformis sapiential Dei secundum praefinitionem saeculorum quam fecit in Christo Iesu Domino nostro'.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for the revelation to the gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:30-32).<sup>272</sup>

Although the feast of Candlemas celebrates the light of Christ coming into the Temple, only the righteous recognise this. Arthur's divine election as king is recognized only by the righteous, others deny these spiritual signs and they reject the new kingdom based on spiritual ideals. Hence division and dissension remain in the land despite the miraculous signs that all should unite under the kingship of Arthur.

The dissension of certain barons means that Arthur will remove the sword from the stone on two more occasions, once at Easter and again at Pentecost. The removal of the sword from the stone at Easter confirms the opposition Arthur will face but it is a reminder that he must maintain the ideals of spiritual chivalry despite this opposition. He must be prepared to die, like Christ, in order to reclaim the kingdom for spiritual principles. By reflecting his willingness to die for his people, he is commissioning his rule for Christ as the risen Christ explains to his disciples in Matthew 28: 18-20:

All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.<sup>273</sup>

The purpose of Arthur's reign is to preserve Christian principles in the kingdom. This must be Arthur's primary concern and, if a battle is to be fought, it must be for these principles. Furthermore, Arthur must also be prepared to die, if necessary, to maintain the Christian faith. Arthur's life, like Christ, must be one of sacrifice to his kingdom, his own personal needs and desires must not factor in any decision Arthur makes about the use of violence.

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<sup>272</sup> In the Latin, 'quia viderunt oculi mei satulare tuum quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum lumem ad revelationem gentium et gloriam plebes tuae Israhel'.

<sup>273</sup> In the Latin, 'data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritu Sancti docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi'.

When Arthur removes the sword from the stone for the final time at Pentecost, the divisions in the land are highlighted again. Although the great lords and the common people witness the event, it is only the common people who accept that it is the will of God that makes Arthur the rightful king (16.12-14). The divisions within the land are emphasized again because the common people threaten to kill anyone who does not acknowledge Arthur as king (16.14-15). The situation can be resolved only by the threat of violence. But the symbolism of Pentecost cannot be ignored as it is used both in the Christian sense and in the Arthurian sense as a time of renewal. The Christian message of Pentecost calls upon all people to repent their sins and ask for forgiveness in the name of Christ, and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>274</sup> In the Arthurian kingdom, Pentecost becomes a reoccurring theme. It is not only the time when Arthur is crowned king, but it is also the future yearly festival where the knights pledge to maintain the principles of the Arthurian Oath that binds them to the Round Table.<sup>275</sup> Pentecost also marks the beginning of the Grail quest and the arrival of Galahad at Camelot whose red armour, red being the colour of Pentecost, signifies that he is a symbol of spiritual renewal. When all these signs are taken together, it is clear that Arthur's final act of removing the sword from the stone and his coronation at Pentecost is a sign of the spiritual renewal that is expected during his kingship.

### **Arthur's estrangement from God**

Acknowledging that his kingship came from God, Arthur is made a knight by the miraculous sword and is dubbed by the Archbishop. Only then is Arthur crowned as the king (16.18-23). Arthur's first act is to right the wrongs occurring in the land since the death of Uther by returning lands to those who had lost them while there was no central authority and great unrest (16.25-30).<sup>276</sup> Having established his right to the kingship, Arthur's energies are spent uniting the kingdom, and he does so by overcoming any resistance by the prowess of himself and his knights (17.1-2). In short, Arthur's authority

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<sup>274</sup> See Acts 2: 38.

<sup>275</sup> See the Pentecostal Oath in *Works*, 120.15-24.

<sup>276</sup> As Beverly Kennedy noted the sword symbolises justice in the sense that it means the king's duty to exercise his power and authority to maintain the right. The king does this duty as a vassal of God. See Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* 23-25.

over the land becomes the product of his might rather than his right, and is therefore imperfect. Although he conquers any resistance in Scotland and Wales, he is unable to entirely subdue all resistance to his kingship. The rest of the *Merlin* becomes the story of how Arthur is estranged from spiritual ideals.

It is important to examine the nature of this residual resistance to Arthur's right to the throne. Despite the fact that Arthur removed the sword from the stone establishing his right by miracle, the question of his youthfulness and birth is raised again (17.23-24). What makes this discussion interesting is the participants as it directly relates back to the circumstances surrounding Arthur's conception. The principal leaders of the resistance are King Lot of Lowthean and Orkney, King Uriens of Gore and King Nayntres of Garloth. Each king has married one of Arthur's half sisters fathered by the Duke of Cornwall, who was murdered in order that Uther might satisfy his lust for Igraine (10.5-12). Therefore, just as the *Sangreal* contrasts the differences between how violence is justified within the ideals of worldly chivalry and how violence is justified within the ideals of spiritual chivalry, the first book of the *Morte Darthur* contrasts the use of violence in the reign of Uther and the use of violence in the reign of Arthur.

Although Arthur has proven without a shadow of a doubt that he has the right of kingship by the will of God and that a new order of peace is to be instituted if the kingdom is unified, the unjustified violence of his father leads to the first war of Arthur's reign. Just as the Duke of Cornwall refused to yield to Uther's demands, the rebel kings refuse to accept Arthur's sovereignty. They are all prepared to commit violence in order to retain their independence from the centralised rule of Arthur despite the spiritual signs that legitimise his claim to the throne. But, unlike Uther's use of violence, by virtue of the fact that Arthur is the divinely ordained king, his use of violence to subdue their resistance is justified. At the beginning of the *Morte Darthur*, the same question that permeates the *Sangreal* comes sharply into focus: why and for what purpose is violence necessary? But, because Malory has answered this question by juxtaposing the causes of war during the kingship of Uther and the causes of war during the time of Arthur, the rules surrounding violent encounters come into focus.

Whereas Uther's war with the Duke of Cornwall was unjust because it was based upon his own desires, Arthur's first war, against these rebels, is just because it is enforcing the will of God. As Bernard of Clairvaux writes:

The knight of Christ, I say, may strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves Christ when he strikes, and serves himself when he falls. Neither does he bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of the good ... He is evidently the avenger of Christ towards evildoers and he is rightly considered a defender of Christians.<sup>277</sup>

Arthur is divinely elected as a king who rules under the auspices of Christ. Therefore he is divinely sanctioned to use violence to repel any attempt to destabilise his kingdom by the use of violence. But this does not give Arthur the right to oppose violent opposition with unreasonable force and the crucial issue when Arthur's response to violent opposition is examined is to analyse whether he uses reasonable or unreasonable force in battle. Therefore, to look at how Arthur drifts away from the ideals of spiritual chivalry and becomes entrenched in the ideals of worldly chivalry it is important to consider how Arthur and his knights conduct this first war. This examination begins by scrutinizing how the first war of Arthur's reign begins.

Arthur mistakenly believes that he has subdued all resistance to his kingship and announces that there will be a great feast at Pentecost at Carlyon to celebrate his coronation in that city. Lot, Uriens and Nayntres arrive with a retinue of sixteen thousand knights, and their allies the king of Scotland, the king with a hundred knights and King Carados swell the number of their forces by another twelve thousand knights (17.3-16). Arthur, unaware of the threat posed by this coalition as he remains unaware of his full family history, sends messages of welcome and the promises of gifts. But these kings are not content with the spiritual signs that proclaimed Arthur's right to the throne and tell Arthur's messengers that they will not accept gifts from a beardless boy who is of low

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<sup>277</sup> Clairvaux, 'In Praise of the New Knighthood', 134. In the Latin, 'Miles, inquam, Christi securus interimit, interit securior. Sibi praesat cum interit, Christo cum interimit. Non enim sine causa gladium portat: Dei enim minister est ad vindictam malefactorum, laude vero bonorum ... et plane Christi vindex in his qui male agunt, et defensor christianorum reputatur'.

birth and the only gift they will give Arthur is his death (17.23-26). Arthur's efforts to unify the kingdom are shattered because this coalition of resistance refuses to obey the will of God. Arthur retaliates by taking five hundred men to a strong tower as the rebel kings lay a siege around him (17.29-34). Having voiced their objection to Arthur's kingship because they believe he is of low birth, many of the rebel kings led by Lot also reject his right when Merlin tells them that Arthur is the legitimate heir of Uther (18.11-14). Merlin advises Arthur to speak to these rebels as their king and chieftain because as a divinely ordained king he will defeat these rebels (18.17-21). And so, Arthur is forced into a position where he must threaten violence to enforce his spiritual right to the throne if they will not accept him as their king through negotiation and mutual consent.

Even though Arthur meets the rebels armed for battle and in the company of the archbishop of Canterbury and his most trusted vassals, they refuse to accept his authority (18.22-32). Arthur has no choice but to eliminate his rivals with violence. Although Arthur and his vassals do great feats of prowess against the rebels, victory comes when he draws his sword (19.20). The sword, which shines so brightly that is described as giving the light of thirty torches, blinds Arthur's enemies. Arthur's initial victory over the rebel kings is achieved by miraculous means. This signifies that this victory is in accordance with the will of God and acts as a signal for the common people to make good their promise to fight for their king (19.20-26). All peoples of the kingdom come out to defeat the rebels because they accept as Arthur their rightful king according to the will of God.<sup>278</sup> Arthur, at this point in his reign, has united his loyal subjects against any subversive elements. The rebels retreat. Arthur has retained his kingdom by the miracle of his sword, which signifies his divine mission to unite the land under the auspices of Christ, and by the intervention of the common people.

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<sup>278</sup> The common people's acceptance of Arthur as their rightful and divinely appointed king is another signal that the kingdom is conforming to the will of God. After the final battle, when Mordred is dead and Arthur is fatally wounded, the common people described as 'pyllours and robbers', come onto the battlefield to plunder the dead knights and murder any still living (1237.34-40). What this contrast demonstrates is that obedience to the will of God does bring peace, whereas resistance to his will brings death, destruction and lawlessness.

As Arthur has not yet won a decisive victory, Merlin advises him to seek help from King Ban of Benwick, the father of Lancelot, and King Bors of Gaul, the father of Bors, who are both currently at war with King Claudas. Lot will later describe their great military prowess in the following exultant terms:

The most valiante knyghte of the worlde, and the man of most renowe, for two brethirne  
as ys kynge Ban and kynge Bors ar nat lyvyng (32.34-36).

Arthur's most trusted knights, Ulphuns and Brasias, are sent to France with letters to Ban and Bors (20.10-35). This episode introduces the family of Lancelot and Bors in the *Morte Darthur* and establishes the innate nobility of these two future knights of the Round Table by presenting their cause in the war with King Claudas as just. This is achieved by the following. First, Claudas is shown to have an unfair advantage in the war. He is described as being 'so myghty of goodes' that he can buy the services of knights rather than earn their loyalty through good kingship (20.19-21). Second, Claudas's knights attack Ulphuns and Brasias as they ride towards Benwick without provocation even though the two knights have asked for the right to pass as emissaries of King Arthur (21.1-3). Later Bors and Ban will explain to Ulphuns and Brasias that these knights were formally their good friends but were now fighting with Claudas (22.7-9). Third, when Ulphuns and Brasias arrive at Benwick and give the letters to the two kings, they agree to come to the aid of Arthur because they recognise that he will protect them both from the ravages of Claudas. Arthur certainly rewards both kings with enough wealth that they will be able to withstand Claudas in the future (26-29). They immediately recognise Arthur's legitimate right to the throne and that the cause he is asking them to fight for is indeed just.

The arrival of the two kings Ban and Bors introduces another significant family group into the *Morte Darthur*. Ban is the father of Lancelot and Bors is the father of Bors and Lionel. The introduction of the family of Lancelot and Bors highlight the internal divisions found in Arthur's kingdom. As his own client-kings are rebelling, Arthur is forced to make alliances with some of the kings of France. In doing so, he is calling on outside resources to subdue the rebellious forces inside his own family group, and has foreshadowed the final civil war that will create the necessary conditions for Mordred's

attempted overthrow of the kingdom. Arthur is defending his kingdom with the family of Lancelot and Bors against the destructive influence of the family of Gawain and Mordred. Although Arthur remains unaware that Lot is, in fact, his half brother-in-law, the seeds of future dissent and conflict have been planted in the *Merlin*. In short, the various and rival factions that will prevent the formation of a cohesive Round Table are created at the very beginning of the *Morte Darthur* and these factions will continue to operate throughout the entire book leading to the breakdown of the Arthurian civilization.

Arthur's actions in the early part of his reign and in his first war create more division within the kingdom. When the forces of Arthur meet the rebel forces in the forest of Bedgrayne, a fierce battle is fought. Although Arthur fights this war for a just cause there is no outright victor and, because there is so much carnage, Merlin warns the king to cease hostilities because God is angry with him (36.29). If Arthur continues to fight the enemy will increase in strength and he will be defeated. The tables have turned against Arthur because in this battle the ideals of spiritual chivalry have been violated as the death toll rises. When this battle is examined in detail, the reason for the change in fortune becomes apparent. This is a battle in which the intention is to fight until the opposing side has been annihilated. The rebel kings, who numbered eleven, swore an oath that they would not leave the battlefield until they destroyed Arthur (25.24-26). It would seem that Arthur's actions in this battle have hardened their resolve and a close examination of the battle demonstrates how this situation has developed. To cut the enemies' supplies Arthur orders that the land around the castle is burnt and destroyed (26.29-30). This has psychological effects as one of the rebels, the King with a Hundred Knights, dreams that the battle is a metaphorical wind sweeping away castles and towns (26.33-35). The metaphorical wind translates into that a reality that sees ten thousand men killed on the first day without producing any decisive result (27.10). Arthur becomes increasingly frustrated by the stalemate and when he sees the King with a Hundred Knights riding on the horse of his foster father, Ector, Arthur is described as 'wrothe' (29.19) and strikes the king with a mighty blow from his sword. Arthur's angry response gives licence to his knights to fight more fiercely, leaving Lot weeping for pity at the death of so many good men after Ban and Bors join the battle (33.5-7). Anger continues

to fuel the ferocity of the knights so that, for example, when Ban is struck with the sword of the King with a Hundred Knights, he also becomes so angry that there is a great slaughter of knights and other men (33.30-32).

This rising tide of anger, resulting in horrendous carnage, finally forces the rebels and their army to retreat, leaving Arthur and his knights to reflect on the battle. Yet having witnessed such slaughter and misery, Arthur can still think only in terms of his needs and desires. Ban and Bors urge Arthur not to be angry with the rebels because they are men of great worship and prowess. Arthur's response is that he cannot love them because they wish to destroy him (34.32-35.4). Arthur shows that he is not considering the effect this battle has on the community and the land because he remains angry with the rebels; his response is to refuse mercy and to resolve to destroy them entirely. Arthur's anger maintains the community in a state of war and division, rather than creating a state of peace and wholeness, and the battle continues until Merlin tells Arthur that only fifteen thousand men, out of the original sixty thousand, have survived the day (36.27-28). Merlin also warns that if the battle continues there will be no decisive victory and as the enemy's strength increases Arthur will be defeated (36.30-32). Therefore Arthur, like his father Uther, has allowed his judgment to be impaired by his emotions and he has not considered the cost of the battle upon his people. Although the rebel kings are forced to return to their own lands because the Saracens have landed, because of his anger and lack of judgment, the kingdom is not yet secure under the Arthur's leadership. He could not defeat the rebels because he had angered God with the slaughter of so many men in this punitive battle as his uncompromising attitude continues to drive his actions.

The representation of a divided nation is brought sharply into view when two external enemies threaten the land. While Arthur supports his ally King Lodegreaunce against the invading King Ryons of North Wales, the folly and divisiveness of the first war come acutely into focus when the eleven rebel kings regroup at Surhauté, a city in King Urien's land, in order to defend their lands against the Saracens who have attacked with a force of forty thousand men. The price of their rebellion is made clear as the Saracens cause much destruction by burning the land and killing anyone who comes within their orbit. If these

rebel kings accepted the sovereignty of Arthur when it was made clear by divine means that he was the rightful king, Arthur would have attacked the Saracens on their behalf as he had done so when he avenged the attack on King Lodegreaunce by Ryons (40.19-24).

Arthur shows his own lack of judgment also because he is portrayed again as being unwilling to accept any opposition to his rule. He is described as 'wrothe' because Ryons is always against him. This excess of emotion leads Arthur and his knights to slay half of Ryons' force, or a further ten thousand men (38.37-39.15). Although Arthur forces Ryons to flee, he will continue to be a problem for Arthur as he will join the rebel forces and will continue to destroy the land until he is slain by the knight, Balin (75.19). Arthur remains unable to bring an end to the war and destruction in the land, even though the beginning of his reign signalled a promised new era of peace and stability after the civil unrest of the last years of Uther's reign and the intervening years between the two kings. This situation occurred because Arthur has not looked within himself to examine how his own actions had led to the deaths of so many men. Moreover his determination to retain the kingship without considering the consequences of his actions weakened the security of land as outside invaders, such as the Saracens, came and caused unspeakable misery.

This episode becomes a prime example of a war which at its beginnings is justified but whose nature drives its participants to alienate themselves from the will of God. When the rebel kings refused to accept Arthur as their rightful king, even though divine signs heralded his right, they also refused to accept the will of God. Having done so they became a subversive element that had to be eliminated by violence. Hence, Arthur's initial decision to wage war upon the rebel kings was justified in terms of the ideals of spiritual chivalry. But during the course of the war Arthur's increasing anger at the effectiveness of his enemy and their attacks on those whom he loved and those who had supported him clouded his judgment. As the war became increasingly fierce, so did Arthur's response to it and this led to the deaths of an inordinate amount of men and to his decision to destroy the viability of the land surrounding the battlefield. He no longer cared about the welfare of the land and its people, he only cared about protecting his right to the throne.

Thus the tone of Arthur's reign has been established back in the *Merlin*. He will invest his energies in creating a fighting force that will overcome any opposition to his reign, but since the internal divisions of the land remain, any hope of peace and stability is fragile. The reforming agenda of the Grail adventure challenges Arthur's worldly view of his kingship. Galahad is a direct spiritual contrast to the worldly Arthur because he intrinsically understands that the Grail rewards those knights who put the needs of the community above the needs of the individual. The ideals of spiritual chivalry demand that the ultimate outcome of violence is to create peace and stability rather than war and division. Therefore, when read from the point of view of the ideals of the *Sangreal*, the *Merlin* most certainly reveals how the Arthurian kingdom alienated itself from spiritual ideals from its very inception.

#### **How Arthur Creates Division within his own Court**

Arthur's inability to come to terms with the ideals demanded by a spiritual view of chivalry also creates divisions within his court. The next episode in the *Merlin*, when Arthur returns to his court, shows his lack of judgment as he relies solely on his own needs and desires. This produces disastrous consequences for the whole kingdom. King Lot's wife and Arthur's sister, Margawse, is sent to the court with her four sons, Gawain, Gaheris, Aggravayne and Gareth, to spy on Arthur (41.11-16). Arthur's judgment is ruled by his desire for Margawse. Although Arthur does not know that she is in fact his half-sister and that he is committing incest, Mordred is conceived during her visit (41.19). Arthur's nemesis, the son who will mortally wound him in the final battle on Salisbury Plain, is conceived in an ill-judged and incestuous act.

The ominous nature of Mordred's birth and the role he plays in the downfall of the Arthurian civilization are spelt out when Arthur dreams that griffins and serpents have come into the land and after much devastation to the people and to the land, Arthur is

killed (41.26-30).<sup>279</sup> What makes this dream of mythical animals so significant is that Arthur's downfall is often predicted in this allegorical form. When Bors visits the Grail castle in *Launcelot and Elaine*, for example, he sees an old dragon torn to pieces by the smaller dragons that were spat out of his mouth (801.4-7). Lancelot himself fights a dragon in a tomb at the beginning of the chapter (793.7-11). What these two events associated with mythical creatures demonstrate is that sin, allegorically depicted as mythical animals, has come into the land. Therefore Arthur's dream following the incestuous conception of Mordred is a symbolic reminder that the effects of Arthur's estrangement from God will be his own demise and this has occurred to such a degree that Arthur's downfall is predicted in the first book of the *Morte Darthur*.<sup>280</sup>

This symbolic interpretation of the nature of his kingship is explained when Merlin tells Arthur that he has displeased God by committing incest with Margawse. He has conceived a child who will destroy the king and all the knights of his realm (44.16-19). What has occurred does change the nature of the problems plaguing Arthur throughout his entire reign. In this episode the divisive forces in the land are not represented in a military and political manner; they have now been embodied in the infant Mordred. Born out of an unnatural union between the king and his sister, his malevolent presence becomes a reminder that Arthur is tied to his passions like his father before him and this tie alienates him from spiritual ideals.<sup>281</sup>

The griffins and serpents as symbols of Arthur's alienation from God are introduced into the narrative as a dream vision, but another mythical animal, the Questing Beast, will be introduced into the narrative as a real creature which Arthur sees as this creature stops at

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<sup>279</sup> If a king is unjust, as Arthur has shown himself to be in his reaction to the fighting abilities of the rebels, and in his error of judgment in his incestuous union with his sister, God will remove that king from his office. See Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*, 24.

<sup>280</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, 'Arthur and Mordred, Variations on an Incest Theme', in *Arthurian Literature* 9, ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), 1-27, 21.

<sup>281</sup> Elizabeth Archibald argues that the incestuous relationship between Arthur and Mordred differs from other similar stories of incest circulating in the middle ages because the main protagonist is Arthur the father and not Mordred the son. This is what marks Mordred as a villain because his life is hidden from the audience until the events surrounding the final destruction of the Arthurian civilization are enacted. See Archibald, 'Arthur and Mordred', 21.

a well to drink. In the *Morte Darthur*, this beast is described only as being the strongest beast and making a noise as if it had many hounds in its stomach (42.11-15) but in earlier versions of the legend of Arthur such as the *Merlin Continuation* in the *Post-Vulgate* cycle, it is, according to Merlin, a symbolic representation of Mordred.<sup>282</sup> It is impossible to assess if Malory intends that the same meaning should be applied to the Questing Beast in this episode, but it is significant that the beast is placed in the narrative directly following Arthur's dream of the griffins and serpents coming into the land and Arthur's death. What can possibly be understood from this episode is that the nature of evil in the Arthurian kingdom has now left the political and social realm of the rebellion of the kings and has now entered the symbolic and spiritual realm. And this is the realm that operates in the Grail quest.

The episode of the Questing Beast examines how evil afflicts the Arthurian world by highlighting an example of knightly adventure as pure folly. After Arthur sees this strange creature, he falls asleep but is awakened by another knight, Pellynore, who has been following the Questing Beast for twelve months. The folly and destructiveness of Pellynore's pursuit is revealed when he announces that the adventure has been so arduous that it has killed his horse (42.25-26). The seeds of conflict between Arthur and Pellynore are sown when Pellynore demands that Arthur gives him his horse to continue the adventure. Arthur, in his pride, demands that Pellynore gives the adventure to him but Pellynore refuses. Having reached a stalemate in their negotiations, both resort to threats of violence. The outcome of this encounter is that Pellynore has challenged Arthur to meet him again near the well where the Questing Beast stopped to drink (43.16-18). What makes this challenge unjustified on the part of Arthur is that his aim in creating a situation that could lead to violence has no other purpose than to establish whether it is Arthur or whether it is Pellynore who is more worthy to take the adventure of the Questing Beast (43.15). It is an example of how violence is used to increase the reputation or honour of the individual rather than to protect the community from

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<sup>282</sup> Antonio L. Furtado, 'The Questing Beast as Emblem of the Ruin of Logres in the *Post-Vulgate*', *Arthuriana* 9, (1999), 27-48.

influences that will alienate it from God. Arthur's reaction to this rather foolish quest demonstrates how removed he has become from the ideals of spiritual chivalry.

It is not only Arthur who has forgotten the original purpose of his reign as it was designated by his removal of the sword in the stone on each of the festivals celebrated between Christmas and Pentecost. His closest advisors show that they have slid into the quagmire of worldly ideals. Merlin comes to Arthur after the episode of the Questing Beast to remind him that he cannot allow himself to become involved in such a frivolous adventure because he is the king. Only at this point in the *Merlin* is Arthur told that he is the rightful king not only by the miracle of the sword in the stone but also because he is the son of Uther and Igraine by Merlin. When Igraine comes to Arthur, his closest advisor Ulfius accuses her of being:

The falsyst lady of the wor[l]de, and the moste traytours unto the kynges person (45.10-11).

He blames Igraine for the Arthur's war against the rebels because she did not openly announce that Arthur was her son. His attack upon Igraine shows that he has forgotten that Arthur is king because he removed the sword from the stone and demonstrated his right by the will of God. No longer will Arthur be known as the king according to the will of God, he will be known as the king because he is the son of the previous king. As such he is no longer identified by spiritual ideals; rather, he is identified by worldly ideals.

Even though Arthur is now fully invested in worldly ideals, spiritual ideals are still operating in Arthur's kingdom. Merlin warns Arthur that he will be physically punished for conceiving a child incestuously and bringing great evil into the land (44.26-27). This Merlin says is the will of God. Arthur will be wounded by Pellynore in a violent encounter that has resulted not only from Arthur's desire to prove that he is more worthy to take the adventure of the Questing Beast but also in his desire to ensure that any opposition to his authority is removed from the kingdom. What this episode demonstrates is that Arthur's desire to create a court filled with loyal followers does encourage unjustified violence because Arthur allows his own needs and desires to cloud the decisions he makes when a situation that has the potential to develop into violence

occurs. It is yet another example of how the ideals of worldly chivalry create division and lead to unjustified violence.

Arthur follows his desire to prove that he deserves to have the pointless adventure of the Questing Beast and endangers the life of a young squire who is determined to prove his worth to the court. This episode, involving the newly made knight Gryfflet, demonstrates how young knights hoping to receive the honours and rewards of the court will be influenced by Arthurian chivalry. The episode begins when a squire comes to Arthur's court leading a knight who has been mortally wounded during the feast given to celebrate Arthur's reunion with his mother. Another young squire, Gryfflet, steps forward and asks to be knighted so that he might prove his own worth to the court by avenging the death of the knight. Arthur agrees to all Gryfflet's demands because Merlin tells Arthur that he will never oppose Arthur (46.32-47.1). This contractual exchange demonstrates how worldly chivalry works. Both parties, Arthur and Gryfflet, make a decision about a potentially violent situation to further their own positions. Arthur ensures that Gryfflet becomes a loyal vassal, while Gryfflet gains the status of knight and the opportunity to receive the reward of honour by demonstrating his prowess. At no instance during this exchange is there a consideration about whether or not a violent response is required to ensure the safety of the entire community.

Gryfflet's opponent in this joust is Pellynore, who is reluctant to fight a young knight with whom he has no argument and because he realizes that he will easily defeat the young knight given his superior strength (47.28-30). But Gryfflet insists on taking the joust and is promptly wounded, although Pellynore demonstrates that he can control his emotions when faced with a violent situation because he does not kill Gryfflet, recognizing his potential to become a good knight (48.10-12). This is significant because Pellynore realizes that Gryfflet is one of Arthur's knights and even though he remains aggrieved because Arthur has challenged his right to the adventure of the Questing Beast, he does not create a situation where further violence is justified by the death of Gryfflet. Gryfflet can return to the court of Arthur and to be healed by the court physician because of Pellynore's good grace. Unlike Pellynore who restrained himself when he had the

opportunity to kill Gryfflet, Arthur's response to the wounding and his actions in the joust with Pellynore demonstrate that his judgment has become clouded by his passions. Again Arthur's reaction to Gryfflet's wounding is described as 'wrothe' (48.27) and he calls for his horse and his arms to avenge this wounding.

Arthur's state of mind and its consequences in terms of the ideals of spiritual chivalry are explored in a telling episode on his way to meet Pellynore. He finds Merlin being chased by three churls, and after they have fled, Arthur tells Merlin that he would have been killed if he had not come along. Merlin answer shows that Arthur is in a very precarious position spiritually because he believes that it is his own strength and prowess, not the will of God, which protects the kingdom and those he loves:

'Nay,' seyde Merlyon, 'nat so, for I cowed a saved myselffe and I had wolde. But thou arte more nere thy deth than I am, for thou goste to thy dethe warde and God be nat thy frende' (49.7-10).

And so as Arthur comes to rely on his own abilities, rather than on God, he is continuing to alienate himself from God. As he does this, his judgment in matters that involve violence becomes more and more impaired, which leads to an escalation of violence and division within the kingdom itself, to the extent that Arthur's own life is now in jeopardy as he meets Pellynore at the well for their appointed joust.

When Arthur does meet Pellynore, who is not identified at this point, conflict and division arise immediately. Although Arthur asks Pellynore not to enforce his custom of demanding that anyone who wishes to pass him must joust with him, Pellynore insists on maintaining this custom (49.14-19). He wants to defend his right to the adventure of the Questing Beast at all costs. The two are so evenly matched that they joust three times until Arthur and his horse fall to the ground. Arthur asks that the fight continues with both knights fighting on foot, but when Pellynore refuses, Arthur is described as 'wrothe' (50.17). This linguistic sign demonstrates again that Arthur has become ruled by his passions and to show that the fighting has increased in intensity as they fight with their swords, Malory describes how they give each other many great strokes and lose their shields, and how much blood flowed from their bodies (50.22-25). It becomes obvious

that what began as a sporting joust, has now become a fight that could not just severely wound the participants but could lead to their deaths. It is another example of how Arthur's anger leads to devastating and destructive possibilities.

Arthur has become so alienated from God and spiritual ideals that the sword he removed from the stone, the symbol of his divine right to the kingship, breaks in two pieces (50.30). After many warnings, Arthur's passions have totally alienated him from God and the divine purpose of his kingship. Pellynore refuses to cease fighting against the disadvantaged Arthur and eventually positions himself for the deathblow. At this point Merlin steps in to save Arthur, appealing to Pellynore on the grounds that killing Arthur will have dire implications for the entire kingdom:

Knyght, holde thy honed, for and thou sle that knyght thou puttyst thys realme in the gretteste damage that evir was realme: for thys knight ys a man of more worshyp than thou wotist off (51.10-13).

But, having seen the destructive force of Arthur's anger, Pellynore lifts his sword in preparation to deliver the deathblow and Merlin has no option but to place an enchantment upon him (51.16-20). Arthur's life is saved and Merlin explains that this knight is holier than Arthur. By implication Pellynore is doing the work of God by almost removing Arthur who has forgotten the divine purpose of his right to the kingship and is now so ruled by passions that he creates destruction in the land. But Merlin comes down on the side of the unity of the land when he explains to Arthur that Pellynore and his two sons, Lamarock and the future Grail knight Perceval, will do good service for Arthur. To achieve this unity Arthur must quell his desire to fight Pellynore and avenge the various injuries that Arthur believes Pellynore has done to him. Arthur must forgive Pellynore rather than continue to fight against him.

When the sword Arthur received when he removed by miracle from the stone breaks, he has become fully alienated from God and the ideals of spiritual chivalry. His next sword, Excalibur, which he receives from the Lady in the Lake in return for a gift, demonstrates

that he has now fully invested in worldly ideals.<sup>283</sup> This is a significant moment in the narrative because Arthur has shown that he follows the path of his father, Uther, rather than the path of God, in that he allows his emotions to cloud his judgment when he is faced with a situation that has the potential to lead to violence. This has substantial outcomes for the kingdom because it will continue to be overwhelmed by the division created as knights fight for their own concerns rather than for the common good of the kingdom. Excalibur, itself, comes to represent the ideals of worldly chivalry because it is given to Arthur on the condition that he participates in a blood feud as the champion of the Lady of the Lake. To stress this point, as soon as Arthur receives Excalibur Merlin has to remind Arthur that Pellynore is his ally when Arthur seeks further vengeance (53.22-32). But the influence of worldly chivalry becomes persuasive and the cracks and divisions in Arthur's court continue to multiply as he becomes further invested in the ideals of worldly chivalry.

Arthur has chosen to rely upon his own prowess and ability to maintain his right to the kingship rather than follow the path of God and the ideals of spiritual chivalry. He has forgotten that he has been made king by God, and in his desire to remove any element from the kingdom that threatens his kingship, Arthur attempts to kill the infant, Mordred, and he sanctions an act so shocking that he gives justification for violence to King Ryons of North Wales to threaten the peace and stability of the land. Ryons, who demonstrates his barbaric intent when he sends a ceremonial coat trimmed with the beards of the eleven kings who he has overcome and only leaving a space for Arthur's beard, enters the land and attempts to conquer it by the burning and massacre of the people (54.25-33). Although this act of violent destruction does give Arthur the right to defend his land and people against Ryons, Arthur's next act calls into question his fitness for the kingship. His concern about his future becomes so great that he calls for all noble children born on May Day to be brought to the court and placed in a ship. The ship is wrecked and kills all the children except Mordred (55.19-33). Arthur proves that he is just as barbaric as

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<sup>283</sup> The 'gift' the Lady of the Lake will demand is the head of the knight, Balin, as vengeance for his killing of the Lady's brother (65.21-25). Again, the destructive nature of the ideals of worldly chivalry is reinforced.

Ryons.<sup>284</sup> Although many of the lords believe this is the act of Merlin, rather than Arthur, and therefore they do not retaliate, Ryons is described as being ‘woode oute of mesure’ (56.4). And as a consequence, by implication, the intensity of the violence increases and the land is further devastated by the effects of never-ending violence and war.

Thus the first chapter of the first book of the *Morte Darthur*, *Merlin*, ends as it begins, with an escalation in the war threatening the peace and unity of the land. As Uther’s response to Igraine’s refusal to commit adultery leads to the death of the Duke of Cornwall, Arthur’s efforts to eradicate Mordred leads to the deaths of many innocent children. All that has really changed is that Arthur’s crime is far more shocking than the crime committed by Uther. The promise of Arthur’s initiation as king in the miracle of the sword in the stone has not materialised and the land remains divided and troubled. Although from this beginning the Round Table rises and the greatest knights come to Arthur’s court to defend him, Arthur will never achieve the unity, stability and peace he craves.

In the *Departure*, the first chapter of the *Sangreal*, Arthur believes his dream of unity and stability seems to have finally come to fruition when Galahad takes the last available seat at the Round Table, the Sege Perillous (858.11-12). Yet, again Arthur will have his dream

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<sup>284</sup> This event links Arthur with the biblical story of Herod who attempted to remove the threat of the infant Jesus because he was fearful that Jesus would usurp his throne. See Matthew 2. As Arthur’s rule had been associated with a new age of peace when he removed the sword from the stone, his killing of the innocent children now associates him with Herod. As the *Golden Legend* explains when Herod heard from the Magi that a child who was destined to be king had been born, he feared that this child would usurp his throne, 57. In the *Gilte Legende*, ‘And in this mene tyme the .iiij. kynges come into Ierusalem and asked of the natiuitee of the new kyng, and whanne Herodes herde that he was gretly troubled and dredde lest any were born of lynage of verray kynges that wold assaile hym and putte hym oute of his rewne (57.23-58.4)’. Arthur has been warned that Mordred, the child of his incestuous relationship with Morgawse, will usurp his throne. This particular act demonstrates how far Arthur has alienated himself from Christ and the Christian principles that held so much promise of peace at the time of his coronation. See also Matthew 2:16. In the Latin, ‘tunc Herodes videns quoniam inlusus esset a magis iratus est valde et mittens occidit omnes pueros qui erant in Bethleem et in omnibus finibus eius a bimatu et infra secundum tempus quod exquisierat a magis’. In the English, ‘then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry; and sending killed all the men-children that were in Bethleem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men’.

shattered because this action not only marks the completion of the Round Table, it signals also the beginning of the Grail quest that challenges the knights to reform the worldly ideals of the Arthurian court. And the dream of a united Round Table maintaining peace and harmony throughout the land is shattered. Arthur's grief at the loss of his Round Table fellowship is expressed when he reproaches Gawain's desire to see the Grail openly when he says:

‘A, Gawayne, Gawayne! Ye have betrayed me, for never shall courte be amended by you.

But ye woll never be so sory for me as I am for you!’ (870.12-14).

All Arthur can do is weep as his knights depart the court as he realizes that the knights are no longer held together by the rewards of honour that he dispenses as they seek the grace that only God can give. But the failure of most knights who attempt the Grail quest also points to the failure of the Round Table because the rewards of worldly chivalry cannot hold the Round Table together. The internal divisions between the family of Lot and the families of Ban and Bors create the necessary conditions that lead to the civil war between Lancelot and Gawain. Furthermore, the Grail's appearance at Camelot demonstrates that the rewards of the Round Table are, in fact, the gift of God. The Grail's gift to each knight, the ‘metis and drynkes as he beste loved in thys worlde’ (865.30-31), reveal that those who do live according to spiritual ideals are justly rewarded in worldly terms. And these spiritual gifts are the rewards of peace, rather than the plunder of war, because as they are presented to the knights of the Round Table each of the knights sees the other knights in a new light. All appeared ‘fayrer than ever they were before’ (865.23). The spiritual rewards of living in peace produced an abundance of worldly treasures. But Arthur, who came to the throne with so much promise, has promptly forgotten this spiritual truth, as shown in the *Merlin*. His overriding concern is to ensure that any opposition to his rule is removed and, as a result, he creates war rather than peace and glorious Arthurian civilization is destroyed by internal dissension and violence.

I would argue that the *Sangreal* is far more significant to the entire *Morte Darthur* than ‘an opportunity offered to the knights of the Round Table to achieve greater glory in this

world,' as Eugène Vinaver suggests.<sup>285</sup> What it represents is a final opportunity to recover the lost ideals embedded in Arthur's removal of the stone in the stone, an episode that sought to bring peace, harmony and unity to the land. Arthur's failure to live up to the ideals of spiritual chivalry have condemned the land to ruin as his kingdom is swept away by internal dissension and the unjustified violence of the final two books. This explains why the Grail leaves the kingdom for the unearthly city of Sarras and why two of the Grail knights cannot return to Camelot because the ideals of spiritual chivalry cannot survive within the framework of Camelot. Therefore, the *Sangreal* is indeed the key to the tragedy of the downfall of the entire Arthurian civilization because its depiction of Galahad's use of violence reveals how Arthur should have justified the violence that he uses. Rather than being concerned only for his position as king, he should have considered the needs of the whole community and used violence only to promote peace by removing any evildoers who would draw the kingdom away from Christian principles of living.

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<sup>285</sup> As quoted in Eugène Vinaver's commentary in Malory, *Works*, 1535.

## Conclusion

For they that are according to the flesh, mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit (Romans 8:5).<sup>286</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated how an understanding of Malory's *Tale of the Sangreal* is central to an overall understanding of the *Morte Darthur* because it exposes the wide gap between how knightly activities should be conducted to protect the community and how knightly activities are practised, leaving the community vulnerable. Judging these activities from the standard of spiritual ideals of chivalry reveals the cause of the failure of Arthurian civilization.

This gap has been exposed by investigating the spiritual biographies of the knights and, in the case of Arthur, the king, to demonstrate how each of them justifies his use of violence. This has shown that the justification of violence was an individual matter, which the knight based on what he considered most important in his life. The sacrifice that each was required to make represented what it was that kept him entrenched in the world and alienated from God. This alienation encouraged the knight to fight for his own sake without taking into account how his knightly activities affected the surrounding community. If a knight embraced spiritual ideals in order to be invited to join the exclusive Grail fellowship, he had to be prepared to sacrifice whatever was most precious to him because his first priority when considering the use of violence was to ensure that any act of violence would bring peace to the surrounding community. Whether the knight was able to make the necessary sacrifice to maintain spiritual ideals of chivalry dictated the direction of his knightly career. These individual biographies exposed Arthurian civilization's lack of concern for the community at large because if the knights are concerned only with their own needs and desires, they are not considering the effect their knightly activities have on the community at large. This is especially true of the common

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<sup>286</sup> In the Latin, 'qui enim secundum carnem sunt quae carnis sunt sapiunt qui vero secundum Spiritum quae sunt Spiritum sentiunt'.

people whose very livelihood is threatened by the effects of knightly violence on the land.

What this thesis has shown is that this concern about the effects of knightly violence on the community was an enduring theme in the Grail legend in the middle ages, beginning with Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*. It has traced how this theme became increasingly Christianized and penitential through Robert de Boron's *Perceval*, and how the legend mirrored the development of historical ideas about the justification of violence. The examination of the early versions of the Grail legend demonstrated that these ideas were formulated by clerics who were alarmed at the effects of knightly activities. One solution to this problem put forward by the church was the crusades and an entire ideology of the proper use of violence grew up around them. A striking clerical response to knightly violence was found in Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*. Here, the contrast between the knight who followed spiritual ideals and the knight who followed worldly ideals was explicit. Although Bernard's treatise was written to support the new military orders, the Templars, who came into being soon after the First Crusade, it also described the differing military values found in the two categories of knights represented in the Grail legend. Bernard's ideal of a spiritual knight found its greatest expression when the *Queste del Sainte Graal* introduced Galahad. He displaced the former premier Grail knight, Perceval, because Perceval's response to knightly activities often hurt, rather than helped, the surrounding community. Thus Galahad's example as the epitome of spiritual knighthood was passed down to Malory's knights in his version of the Grail legend, the *Sangreal*.

The inclusion of Galahad in Malory critiques the chivalric activities of the Round Table knights. Therefore, the *Sangreal* does not present an opportunity for Arthurian civilization to gain greater glory in this world, as Vinaver argues; rather its purpose is to provide the knights of the Round Table with a chance to take stock and examine how their activities affect the entire kingdom. The solution to this knightly dilemma is to encourage the knights to focus their attention on spiritual matters, through examining their consciences when confronted by a potentially violent situation. They must ensure

that a violent response will have a beneficial effect on the whole community and the reward for doing so is that they develop a close relationship with God. By aligning the proper justification of violence with spiritual ideals, Malory makes the influence of crusading ideology pervasive throughout the *Sangreal*. This close analysis of the Grail journeys of each knight has demonstrated this.

I have argued that the *Sangreal's* discussion of how violence should be justified according to spiritual ideals is a major structural theme throughout the *Morte Darthur*. It is also a theme that has been largely neglected in the critical reception of the work. I suggest that one of the key reasons for its neglect is the attention paid to Lancelot, at the expense of many other knights, in the critical literature. By examining the spiritual biography of three Grail knights, it is possible to see that each presents a different expression of the spiritual ideal of knighthood. Their ideal forms of spirituality can then be compared with the spiritual biographies of other knights, such as Lancelot, and with the king, Arthur, demonstrating their worldly focus. It is from this point of view Arthurian chivalry can be judged against the spiritual ideal.

As each biography has uncovered the knight's intentions as they justify their use of violence, the reader has been given a glimpse of his inner world. This is an aspect of each knight prominent in the *Sangreal* that is not examined thoroughly in the early books of the *Morte Darthur*. As their inner worlds are explored, the tensions within Arthurian society are revealed and the reasons for the final destruction become credible. What the *Sangreal* offers the *Morte Darthur* is both a critical examination of the activities of the knights and a solution to their destructiveness. The knights' inability to incorporate this spiritual solution to knightly violence in Arthurian civilization makes the final destruction of Camelot a tragedy. When these spiritual biographies are taken into account, a deeper understanding of the *Morte Darthur* emerges leading to a greater appreciation of how the individual books interact with each other and the entire text. It is from this point of view that the *Sangreal* becomes the ideological heart of the entire *Morte Darthur*.

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