

ABSTRACT

“And thus was the quest begonne in them”: Conversion of the Heart through Catholicism
in *Le Morte D’Arthur*

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As one of the most comprehensive and intricate works of Arthurian literature, *Le Morte d’Arthur* remains widely read and intensely studied, even hundreds of years after its publication in 1485. One continually scrutinized topic surrounding this magnificent work is the extent to which it encompasses and encourages authentic Christianity. This thesis converses with such ongoing discourse and also desires to exemplify that Malory’s work is not only genuinely Christian, but deeply Catholic. Through interaction with existing scholarship and a close study of the text, this thesis serves to illuminate Malory’s *Morte* through the two fundamental roots of the Catholic faith: Scripture and Tradition. Grounding his work in these two pillars, Malory reveals that the ultimate Arthurian quest is the “quest begonne in them”—the quest seeking eternal life.

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“AND THUS WAS THE QUEST BEGONNE IN THEM.” CONVERSION OF THE
HEART THROUGH CATHOLICISM IN *LE MORTE D’ARTHUR*

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Come, Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Christian Question

“And than uppon a Munday in the mornynge, as they were departed frome an abbay they com to a crosse whych departed too wayes” (Field 684.3-5).¹ A scribble. A pause. “For the way on the ryght hande betokenyth the hygheway of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryst, and the way of a good trew lyver. And the othir wey betokenyth the way of synnars and of myssebyelevers” (686.16-18). A rustle of pages. Another scribble, another pause. Then, the clanging of the bells.

Just down the street from the Franciscan Greyfriars Church, clanging its bells at Mass time, lay Newgate prison. Behind its thick bars sits Sir Thomas Malory, pen in hand, mind aglow. The result? One of the most comprehensive and intricate works of Arthurian literature. *Le Morte d'Arthur* remains widely read and intensely studied, even hundreds of years after its publication in 1485. Its unique means of creation, artfully crafted language, and dizzying length captivates scholars and provide endless subjects to research. One continually scrutinized topic surrounding this magnificent work is the extent to which it encompasses and encourages authentic Christianity. Christianity permeates *Le Morte d'Arthur* (hereafter, the *Morte*); approximately once per page, a reference to Christianity emerges (Clark, “Masses and Feast Days” 1). Dr. Thomas Hanks

¹ All references in this thesis Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* come from the P.J.C. Field edition. The first number refers to the page number of his text; the second, to the line number on that page.

Jr. and Janet Jesmok describe Christianity as “omnipresent” within the text (*Malory and Christianity* 2). The work reflects the pious society around it—and fifteenth century England was predominantly Catholic. Malory, and his audience, were very familiar with the *Morte’s* regular inclusion of the Sacraments (ibid, 3), prayers, hagiographic allusions, and Christian themes (Cherewatuk, “Christian Rituals in Malory” 78). Thus, the challenge does not regard the mere presence of Christianity generally—but rather the authenticity of devotion in such portrayals. One side of the discourse jousts that Malory replaces Christianity with his own idea of chivalry; the other parries that his work is inspiring in its portrayal of Christian conversion and hope. Hanks and Jesmok conclude that, “no one perspective dominates the scholarly conversation” (*Malory and Christianity* 2). These two sides have jostled against one another since the *Morte* was first written, and this paper desires to join the tourney, but flying a slightly different flag than many before it.

Many *Morte* scholars have found it lacking in so-called genuine Christian virtue, hope, and morality. They offer perceived evidence in the text for a secular Malory that ranges from a dismissal of Catholicism as a cultural norm, chivalry as a substitute for religion, to even just a mere absence. One of the most influential Arthurians was Professor Eugene Vinaver, who articulated that the *Morte’s* pervading chivalry was a practice “that can be examined without reference to religion” (Robeson 193), that it could “include love and war, but not God” (ibid), and that the *Morte* only emphasizes pursuit of worldly glory (Hanks, 13). More recent critics in the nineteenth century renounced the work as an opportunity for “Christian didacticism” (Robeson 192), and those in the twentieth century “found the ideologies of Malory’s work not in Christianity or classical

literature, but in the cultural institutions of Malory's day" (191). Scholars such as Larry D. Benson, John Leyerle, and Andrew Lynch, among many others, suggest that chivalry did not equate with morality, and that the work instead promotes a "secular Scripture of chivalry" (194). Some, like Dorsey Armstrong, claim that Malory does not include Christianity at all: "in Malory's text religion and spirituality are notable primarily for their absence" ("Malory and Character" 160). Some even go so far to say that it is not God, but "kighthood" that is "the alpha and omega of Malory's text" (154). Though these scholars and their arguments are considered, I desire to counter these readings of a secular Malory.

Other academics read quite the opposite in Malory's *Morte*; they instead write that the story is full of rich Christian themes and profound spirituality. Specifically, scholars such as Hanks, Cherewatuk, and Raluca L. Radulescu illustrate the depth of Malory's Christianity within the text. Not only is Christianity "omnipresent" (Hanks and Jesmok 1) or "imbued within the text" (3)—but its presence is intended to be beautiful and moving. Professor Hanks sees the tale as an unveiling of the absolute grace and mercy of God; through Malory's edits to the original sources, he "gives the narrative a new religious dimension, finally transforming his tale of chivalry and noble love into one of God's grace and Christian redemption" (Hanks 10). Radulescu recognizes this as well, writing that the "entire *Morte* is marked by religious observance in an unobtrusive way" (212). Even Lisa Robeson, the author of the article "Secular Malory", concedes that scholars such as Hanks and Radulescu "demonstrate that Malory's text resists complete secularization and offers possibilities for future scholars interpreting those sections of the *Morte* that clearly contain Christian reference" (195). That is precisely what this paper

aims to do. Using these and a plethora of additional scholars, this paper seeks to answer the call that Malory's "views on and thematic use of Christianity have long since needed a closer look" (Hanks and Jesmok 3).

The Christianity within the *Morte d'Arthur* is not merely cultural, and it is not merely included nominally—the Christianity within this text is richly and profoundly Catholic. The experienced scholars exploring the Christianity within the *Morte d'Arthur* allude to this fact, yet they do not always mention it directly, and in failing to do so, they overlook another level of depth that the *Morte* offers. While the terms "Catholic" and "Christian" were nearly interchangeable in Malory's time, and are so in this paper, the latter divergence of Catholic and newly introduced Protestant thought can, at times, muddy the waters when scholars seek to analyze it from a Christian perspective. In this paper, I will present and highlight various moments in the *Morte* and further reveal what they offer to Malory's audience—as well as an audience of today—when witnessed specifically through the lens of Catholic faith.

Through interaction with existing scholarship and a close study of the text, this paper will attempt to illuminate Malory's *Morte* through the two fundamental roots of the Catholic faith: Scripture and Tradition. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) explains that these two pillars "are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal" (paragraph 80)². It is

² The *Catechism*, though published firstly in the 1500's, is still relevant regarding the Catholic beliefs in Malory's time. The CCC was a consolidation of Catholic teachings dating back to the time of the Apostles. The CCC is organized not by page numbers, but by paragraphs; hence, I will cite them as "paragraph" before the number. To explain the origin of the belief being discussed, paragraphs from the *Catechism* footnote the location in Scripture or the writing of the Church Fathers. While those notes are not included here, they serve as excellent resources; I

essential to understand the two as unique, but heavily dependent upon one another to support the Catholic Church. “The Church...does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (paragraph 82). This relationship between the two can be seen within the *Morte*; though Scripture and Tradition are manifested in their own distinct ways, they ultimately join together to create the authentic Catholic Christianity within its pages.

Scripture is defined by the *Catechism* as “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit” (paragraph 81). Within the context of the *Morte*, Scripture refers to the possible references to the Bible that Malory either maintains or adds. One of the most alluring qualities of the *Morte* is its simultaneously precedent and unprecedented development: it was pieced together from widely-known Arthurian tales at the time, and yet it was Malory’s own masterful creation. Professor Ralph Norris explains this process succinctly—Malory “also added a wealth of details taken from his extensive reading. Malory’s sources consist primarily of selections from French and English Arthurian literature and are usefully discussed as falling into the categories of major and minor” (33). This was a common mode of authorship in the Middle Ages, but as more sources from Malory’s time are discovered, his particular artistry is made more apparent. Malory was more than a “mere compiler” (32); the choices of what stories he collects as compared to what stories he composes concede him to be a “great literary artist” (ibid). K.S. Whetter comments that “The *Morte* was still popular enough in court that even in the reign of Elizabeth I Roger Ascham could

would highly encourage exploration of them in relation to this topic. The version cited here is the most recent edition of the *Catechism*, published in 1992.

famously complain about people reading the *Morte* instead of the Bible” (2). It is arguable that those readers were, in fact, seeing passages of the Bible in the pages of the *Morte*. While most Arthurian scholarship alludes to Malory’s use of Scripture, there does not yet exist a deeper exploration into potential and deliberate inclusions of the Bible as a direct source for the *Morte*. Ralph Norris terms Malory’s “familiarity with literature” as leaving “verbal echoes” throughout the work (41). Malory’s own use of Scripture appears in such “verbal echoes”. Biblical allusions echo through avenues such as similarities in plot and similarities in language as compared to the *Morte*. While much more could and should be written about Malory’s use of Scripture, the exploration here hopes to begin this adventure of these Biblical echoes.

“Holy Tradition”, on the other hand, is a “living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit” (CCC paragraph 78), that “transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad” (paragraph 81). Put simply, Tradition is an inherited, sacred trust deposited by the Apostles and their successors through their teachings. This includes aspects of Catholicism such as apostolic succession, Marian dogmas, the beliefs explicitly stated within the Creed, the understanding of the place of Sacraments for spiritual growth, and hagiography, also known as the lives of the Saints that have been passed down (Cherewatuk, “The Saint’s Life of Sir Lancelot”). Radulescu notes that “Arthur and his court regularly hear mass, go to confession and attempt to live by standard Catholic precepts. Unsurprisingly, important courtly events are scheduled to coincide with major feasts in the Christian

calendar, as in the original Old French Vulgate romances” (212). It is these exact details that this paper will expound under the heading of Tradition. This analysis will center specifically around Malory’s use of Church Feast Days, the Sacraments, and the role of priests and apostolic succession within the *Morte*, elaborating the richness of the Catholic Christianity that Malory is conveying through these means.

The resonance of Scripture and Tradition is not within their inclusion alone, but in how Malory intertwines and crafts them to lead the knights into a deeper faith throughout the *Morte*. To be sure, the sheer number and inclusion of these two pillars is sufficient to trust in the *Morte*’s devotion to Catholicism. Malory could have included these elements subliminally, associating them only insofar as necessary; instead, he subtly but generously incorporates both into climactic and influential moments of the story. Yet, when tracing the patterns of these pieces of Scripture and Tradition, Malory not only includes but exemplifies a conversion of heart through the Catholicism he incorporates. His uses of Scriptural echoes both in phrasing and within the storyline, Church Feast Days, the Sacraments, and roles of the priest shift throughout the work to unveil a deeper conversion of heart that can be found within them. In order to behold this clearly, each of these pieces of Scripture and Tradition will be considered within three parts of Malory’s *Morte*: the Pre-Grail Quest, the Grail Quest, and the Post-Grail Quest. Though the devotion and relationship to Christianity within the *Morte* changes slightly even from chapter to chapter, these three sections will be the means by which the spiritual transformation can be more easily distinguished. Grounding his work in these two Catholic pillars of Scripture and Tradition, Malory ultimately reveals that the greatest Arthurian quest is found in the knights’ search for eternal life.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pre-Grail Quest

Introduction

In the beginning was Uther Pendragon, no Arthur, and no Grail. The spiritual journey of the *Morte Darthur* is defined as the beginnings of true Christian devotion, yet with growth still to come. Books I through X of Caxton's edition, encompassing the tales of "The Birth and Rise of Arthur" through "The First and Second Book of Tristram de Lione" are defined here as the "Pre-Grail Quest" section. I do this in order to study more closely the change in Christian devotion before, during, and after the challenging and spiritually rich Grail Quest. Within this spiritual journey, the Pre-Grail Quest books place Catholicism's Scripture and Tradition notably and effectively within the *Morte* as an essential driver of the plot and a key understanding of the thematic thrust of the *Morte*. The Scriptural allusions of the Pre-Grail Quest are subtly placed; yet, they still fix Christianity within the core of the *Morte*, both in the language used by Malory as well as the similarities between the stories of his characters and Biblical figures. Malory's inclusion of Feast Days, the Sacraments, and priests exemplify the Catholic Tradition at the heart of the *Morte* that his Medieval Christian audience would immediately recognize. Though the knights practice Catholicism faithfully, I found that their interior devotion is minimal before the Grail Quest—a move I believe Malory makes intentionally for the sake of showing greater spiritual growth in the later books. In the Pre-Grail Quest books, I will explore these four pieces of Scripture and Tradition, and the way in which they reveal both a strong and true

foundation of Catholicism in the *Morte* and yet leave an opportunity for deeper spiritual growth.

Scripture

As prefaced in the Introduction, there is little to no existing scholarship centering around Scriptural allusions within Malory's *Morte*. Malory was well-read, and apt at integrating large volumes of sources into the *Morte*. Karen Cherewatuk notes his involved knowledge of the lives of the Saints ("The Saint's Life of Sir Lancelot" 64); and given his knowledge of Medieval Christianity, one might argue that Malory was writing with the language and stories of the Bible in his mind. It is certainly possible that Malory had no intention of writing the Bible into the examples given here. However, this seems unlikely given the sheer quantity of such examples throughout the text. Moreover, even if one conceded that point, a case can still be made that Medieval Christianity permeated the culture so deeply that, intended or not, translated or not, the *Morte* holds verbal echoes of Scripture. The Latin *Vulgate* was the only Bible available in Malory's time, and Malory's own implementation of Latin phrases in the *Morte* confirms at least some knowledge of the language. I am not so bold as to claim that every one of these examples is the same interpretation that Malory intended his readers to take. I do claim, however, that scholars would be remiss to discount Scripture as a source that animates the *Morte*, setting the tone for the phrases and language that echo throughout the text.

The Pre-Grail books exhibit a variety of potential echoes of Scripture, of which only a brief few will be explored here; some being louder than others. One possible Scriptural echo falls in the introduction of Balyn. Balyn, seeking adventure, calls to the damosel bearing the sword into Arthur's court and miraculously pulls it from its sheath.

When the damosel requests the return of the sword now that he has received worship, Balyn blatantly refuses. To this, the damosel replies, “and the swerd shalle be your destruction” (Field 50.4-5). This echoes another Biblical moment from Christ’s Passion and Death; from this one, in the Agony in the Garden. When Peter slices off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Jesus rebukes him, saying, “Put up again thy sword into its place: for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (*Vulgate*, Mt 26:52)³. Seeing as the *Morte*’s adventures abound in sword-wielding—in the hands of even virtuous knights—it does not seem as if Malory intends to convey that all swords are instruments of evil. Rather, Balyn could be an example of this verse coming to fruition, for just as the damosel declares, that very sword brings great sorrow to Balyn when he uses it to kill the one he loves the most. This obscure line placed in the mouth of a more obscure character may not have been intended to reflect these words of Christ; however, it does not mean that this line was not imbued with Christianity given that the same language from Scripture appears here in the *Morte*.

Another more hidden example occurs within the first few pages of the *Morte* at the death of Uther Pendragon. In the beginning of Book 1, Malory writes that Uther “therwith he yelde up the ghost” (Field 6.23-4). Malory uses this same phrasing much later regarding Queen Elizabeth: “And therewith the quene gaff up the goste and dyed” (290.31). This precise phrasing of “yielding up the ghost” is the same phrasing referencing Christ Himself on the Cross in three of the four Gospels. From Matthew, “And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost” (*Vulgate*, Mt 27:50). John, too, writes, “And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost” (*Vulgate*, Jn. 19:30).

³ All of my Bible quotations are English translations of the Latin *Vulgate*.

And the Gospel of Luke: “And saying this, He gave up the ghost” (*Vulgate*, Lk. 23:46). These last words of Christ are the pinnacle of the Gospels, the moment of greatest Love. Malory most certainly would have known this phrase from Scripture. That is not to say that Malory desires to equate Queen Elizabeth or Uther Pendragon with Christ in the *Morte*. If nothing else, this Scriptural echo could demonstrate that the deaths of Medieval Christians should imitate that of Christ, by surrendering their very souls in love to their Creator.

Another allusion occurs in the similarities within the plot of the *Morte* and passages from Scripture. One of these moments within the books preceding the Grail Quest transpires upon Arthur’s discovery that the child of his incest, Mordred, will usurp him and take over his kingdom. In the earlier moments of the *Morte*, Arthur has relations with King Lot’s wife—who, unbeknownst to him, is his sister. Arthur is made privy to this information from Merlin in disguise, who relays to him that “for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme” (Field 36.16-17). In response to this, Arthur heeds Merlin’s advice and calls for the children four weeks old and younger to be placed on a ship and set out to sea. Though the ship wrecks into a castle, Mordred miraculously survives (46.15-17). Arthur’s attempts to slaughter Mordred by gathering and slaughtering all the children suggests two particular moments from Scripture: Pharaoh’s attempt to murder Moses, and Herod’s effort to kill Jesus. Moses’ survival is nearly identical to Mordred’s. Pharaoh, threatened by the children of the Hebrews, orders all the children to be thrown in the Nile. Moses only survives because Pharaoh’s daughter discovers him floating down the river in a papyrus basket (*Vulgate*, Ex 2:5). Both Mordred and Moses are set into waters

to die, and both are discovered and rescued by another who was “compassionate” (*Vulgate*, Ex 2:6) or “good” (Field 46.17). While Herod does not declare death of the children by water, he, nonetheless, acts in a similarly cruel manner. When Herod realizes the magi deceived him, he was “exceedingly angry”, and ordered the massacre of all children in Bethlehem two years and younger (*Vulgate*, Mt 2:16). Jesus’ life is spared only because God warned St. Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt. Arthur, like Pharaoh and Herod, murders needlessly, for the child he attempted to slaughter was the only one that survived. Whether or not Malory intended for Arthur to be compared to these two infamous Biblical men is uncertain—but the similarities cannot be overlooked.

Another hint of Scripture centers on Balyn, a knight this chapter has already introduced. Balyn is both a prisoner and a “cosyn vnto kyng Arthur” (Field 48.32-3), and he is described by Malory as “poore and poorly arayde” (49.3). After Balyn successfully unsheaths and subsequently steals the sword from the damosel, the Lady of the Lake emerges into Arthur’s court to claim her restitution for the gift of the sword Excalibur. Her request is not one that is easily satisfied: “I aske the hede of thys knyght that hath wonne the swerde, othir ellis the damesels hede that brought hit” (51.9-11). While this exchange does not ultimately conclude in the way that the Lady of the Lake outlines, it nevertheless strongly correlates to the story of St. John the Baptist. John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, “was clothed in camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins” (*Vulgate*, Mk 1:6). This image invokes the description of one who is “poore and poorly arayde” (Field 49.3). St. John the Baptist, like Balyn, was a prisoner; though where Balyn’s captivity only resulted in the threat of a beheading, St. John the Baptist’s imprisonment was not as fortunate. In the Gospel of Mark, Herod’s daughter performs a

dance for him and those at his birthday feast, and Herod promises to her whatever she desires. Upon the advice of her mother, Herod's daughter asked, "saying: I will that forthwith thou give me in a dish, the head of John the Baptist" (*Vulgate*, Mk 6:25). King Arthur and Herod both find themselves bound to a promised exchange with a steep sum—a dance and a sword for another's life. While I do not think that Balyn's story is meant to be a fully allegorical retelling of St. John the Baptist, there is nonetheless too much correlation between their stories to be ignored.

Malory, being a faithful Catholic in Medieval England, was familiar with Scripture—likely as much as he was with his other sources for the *Morte*. While the *Morte's* adventures were crafted deliberately from other Arthurian tales as sources, the work is immersed in Scripture. These examples explore the possibility that Scripture, whether originally added or merely maintained by Malory, is a key piece of the *Morte*. The *Morte D'Arthur* is a fundamentally Christian work, and its ability to subtly weave Scripture into its pages exemplifies how deep its authentic devotion runs.

Tradition: Feast Days

Perhaps one of the more obvious foundations of Catholicism in the *Morte D'Arthur* is the abundant mention of Church feast days throughout the entirety of the work. "None of this would surprise Malory's first medieval audiences" Radulescu writes, "for time in medieval narrative – and in Arthurian romance in particular – is often measured following the major divisions in the Christian calendar, pragmatically defined according to periods of fast and times of celebration" ("Spiritual Malory", 213). Feast days fall under Catholic Tradition in that while they are rooted in Scripture, they are ultimately declared by the Church. Laity and clergy alike are encouraged to use feast

days, particularly, as days of genuine celebration. In his impressive exploration of Malory's use of feast days, Professor Clark articulates that Malory "is selective about the feast days appearing in the *Morte*" ("Masses and Feast Days", 81), and that his "feasts are far more likely to originate with him than to originate in his sources" (92). Feast days were not simply cultural or included into the *Morte* without thought; Malory inserts them deliberately and purposely. Of the three sections examined in this paper overall, the Pre-Grail Quest books reference feasts most frequently and equivocates them most strongly as key for bringing about and marking important moments in the *Morte*. Clark notes that "Malory adds more feasts to the beginning of the *Morte* than to the conclusion" (96). Celebrating large events on a Church Feast was a popular cultural practice; Malory deliberately nests Church feast days primarily within the Pre-Grail Quest as a means for his audience to associate significant moments of the *Morte* with Catholic Tradition. Doing so at the beginning of his work conditions his audience to associate significant events of the tale with the chronology of Christianity as they continue to appear throughout the rest of the work.

Malory begins his treatment of Feast Days not with Uther Pendragon, with whom the *Morte* opens, but with Arthur's origins. The country is in need of a king upon Uther's death, and Merlin advises the Archbishop of Canterbury to send for the lords of the realm to "London come by Cristmas" (Field 7.3-4) in hopes that He "that was borne on that nyghte that he wold of his grete mercy shewe some myracle, as he was come to be kynge of mankynde, for to shewe somme myracle who shold be rightwys kynge of this reame" (6.33-4, 7.1-2). Malory here links Christmas—the coming of The King of Kings—directly with his own tale in the coming of a lesser king. It is not coincidental that Malory

chooses Christmas Day as the moment of Arthur's coming, either. The long-anticipated miracle of God becoming man in a covert cave is directly aligned to the desire of the kingdom to miraculously find a man, hidden within it, to become their ruler. This connection is drawn further when, after a long time of deliberation and confirmation of Arthur's kingship, he is crowned as emperor by the Pope on a following Christmas (188.4).

One could argue that the presence of feasts, such as the prior feast on Christmas, does not actually prove an authentic Catholicism in the *Morte*, but, rather, the opposite—that Malory instead desires to show that chivalry usurps and seeks to replace the Catholic beliefs that it only appears to be honoring. This is one way to read these choices of Malory's, and some do support this reading; yet, upon closer inspection, this does not truly seem to be what Malory presents. Clark again serves as a helpful guide to this seeming contradiction. The Christmas Feast Day is mentioned a mere five times in the *Morte*, and three of them are associated with Arthur ("Masses and Feast Days", 147). Malory is not replacing Christianity; rather, as Clark writes, he is "using the feast to reinforce the image of Arthur as an ideal Christian king, a representative of Christ" (146). This explanation satisfies the prior concern. Malory is linking Arthur's kingship to that of Christ's Kingship not to supplant it, but, instead, to be subordinate to it. Christians are called to imitate Christ, and Arthur is no exception; in fact, he, more than others, should be a model of Christ for his kingdom. Dorsey Armstrong writes that "Arthur is an absent presence in the text; the foundational nature of his kingship so pervasive that it becomes almost invisible" ("Malory and Character" 161)—one could also argue such a description is Christ-like. Clark says also that the first four mentions of Christmas take place in the

first third of the *Morte*—or in the Pre-Grail Quest. Malory’s deliberate use of the Christmas Feast Day with Christ’s Kingship, especially in this first third of the *Morte*, serves to both highlight the importance of feast days to the work overall, as well as to indicate a devotion to this Tradition that goes beyond cultural adherence.

The most repeatedly mentioned feast day throughout the entirety of the *Morte* is that of Pentecost. Radulescu writes that “Pentecost becomes the most important date in the calendar of the Arthurian court” (“Spiritual Malory” 213). Indeed, even Lisa Robeson, an advocate for a secular Malory, admits that Pentecost was “often the time to begin an Arthurian adventure” (198). The feast of Pentecost, explained in the second chapter of Acts, marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the official birth of the Christian Church. The Apostles in the Upper Room were empowered to love the world as Christ did through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus begin their mission of sharing the Gospel. Pentecost is mentioned twenty times in the Pre-Grail Quest section alone, and much of its significance is associated with this spirit of Christian mission, as I will elaborate upon below.

The first mention of Pentecost comes about when Arthur pulls the sword from the stone in front of the masses and is consequently crowned (Field 10.30-35). The Feast of Pentecost is thus the day when Arthur embraces his own new mission and adopts responsibility for the holiness of the community around him. The scene itself gives faint echoes of this first celebration of Pentecost: “wherfore alle the comyns cryed at ones...all they knelyd at ones both ryche and poure, and cryed Arthur mercy” (Field 10.33, 11.1-2). The large crowd of people of all levels of the hierarchy hints at the people “from every nation under heaven who had gathered” in Jerusalem (*Vulgate*, Acts 2:5). St. Peter

baptized three thousand Jews into the Church that day who accepted Christ's teaching (*Vulgate*, Acts 2:41), and the people in the crowd at Arthur's coronation likewise accept Arthur's kingship (Field 11.1-15).

One of the most studied examples regarding the Feast of Pentecost is the Pentecostal Oath that Arthur's Round Table swears, which the knights promise to swear annually on the Feast of Pentecost (Field 97.23 – 98.3). Clark mentions that Malory "relies on his references to Pentecost to evoke for the reader the analogy between the founding of the church in Acts 2 and the founding of the Round Table" ("Masses and Feast Days" 119), which becomes largely applicable when discussing the Pentecostal Oath. The Oath was not borrowed from another source, but is one of Malory's own creations, and it emphasizes mercy and justice in interactions with ladies, other knights, and in accord with the law. Many scholars critically question this Oath for its lack of spirituality, especially for being sworn on the Feast of Pentecost. Dorsey Armstrong summarizes this by claiming that "the question of religion is one that the Pentecostal Oath does not address – except, arguably, in the fact that it is re-sworn every year on the high feast of Pentecost" ("Malory and Character" 159). This issue of the Oath's seeming lack of faith can, however, be interpreted instead as Arthur's way of adhering to the purpose of the feast by charging his knights to "defend the Holy Church and the faith" (*ibid*) that was established at the first Pentecost. While the Oath is lacking in spirituality directly, it can be interpreted as the concrete means by which the Round Table agrees to live out the Christian faith by protecting the Church and acting justly toward others.

Most other mentions of Pentecost in the *Morte*, especially in the Pre-Grail Quest books, are either commands to other knights to join or a direct celebration of feasts and

tournaments in Camelot. While mentions of Pentecost are often associated with meaningful events in the *Morte*, even smaller and seemingly meaningless instances suggest the significance of the feast day in its repetition. Malory uses both occasions within this third of the *Morte* to convey the essential nature of the Church calendar throughout.

There are several other feast days mentioned within the Pre-Grail Quest books that deserve more specific analysis than can be given here; however, most follow the same precedence as given above. A few other instances outside of Christmas and Pentecost can also be read as an emphasis of the Tradition of Feast Days by corresponding to the feast on which they fall. Twelfth Day, or the Feast of the Epiphany, designates when Arthur pulled the sword from the stone in the presence of the Archbishop and the others who had been unsuccessful at removing the sword from the stone (Field 10.5). This Feast celebrates the unexpected but welcomed arrival of the Magi from foreign lands to worship the Lord, and Malory writes that Arthur himself arrives from another place (8.4-5) and ultimately begins to acquire his own worship. The Feast of the Presentation at the Temple is referred to as Candlemas; where the Christ-child was presented at the temple to the Father, Arthur again presents himself before the barons and pulls the sword from the stone once more (10.15-18). All Hallows Mass, also identified as All Saints Day, constitutes a large reunion with Ban, Bors, and their troops, and there is a “grete feeste” (17.2). It is not hard to conceive that a reunion with all the Saints in Heaven as being perhaps the most joyful of feasts. On the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, a Catholic Marian dogma deeply rooted in Tradition, Arthur hosts a tournament in which Gareth exemplifies his love for Dame Lionesse learned “from popular medieval

devotional attitudes toward Mary” (“Masses and Feast Days” 168). Another is Michaelmas, or St. Michael the Archangel’s Feast Day, and the Bishop of Canterbury officiates many weddings (Field 286.3-5)—possibly to ask for St. Michael’s protection in these weddings against the snares of the devil. These brief examples, while they do not do true justice to the abundance of feast days in the Pre-Grail Quest books nonetheless reveal the emphasis Malory places upon feast days in the Church calendar.⁴

While some feasts are more strongly mirrored by the plot of the *Morte* than others, even the repeated recurrence of feasts accentuates how essential the Church calendar in the *Morte* is overall. This Pre-Grail Quest section, then, is essential in this regard for establishing a foundation for the importance of faithful Catholicism in this work.

Tradition: The Sacraments

“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith.” (CCC, paragraph 1210). Though the outward celebration of these seven Sacraments differs slightly in different times and places, they are, nonetheless, held in the highest esteem by the Catholic Church when it comes to nourishing the hearts of the faithful on Earth. The Sacraments flow from Scripture, but

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If the topic of the repetition of words in the *Morte*, especially as it regards to events related to this thesis, interests you, see Cato’s work exploring the uses and repetition of words in Malory’s *Morte*.

they are placed under Tradition for the sake of this analysis because of how Tradition guided the Church to carry them out concretely in Malory's time and place; though it must be conceded that the Sacraments, of all the Catholicism presented here, is the greatest example of Scripture and Tradition "com[ing] together in some fashion to form one thing" (CCC, paragraph 80). In the Pre-Grail Quest books, Malory indicates the presence of six of the Catholic Sacraments. The only one not included is the Sacrament of Confirmation—either because it was mostly administered to young adults, which are scarce in the *Morte*, or because of the more unorganized nature of the Sacrament's celebration (Meade 24). While the Sacraments do not at first appear in the Pre-Grail Quest section to radically transform the interior life of the characters, the presence of the Sacraments nevertheless affirms the Catholic character of the *Morte* and lays the groundwork for deeper spiritual growth to come.

Baptism, the first Sacrament to be celebrated in the spiritual journey of a Christian, rightly comes first in the *Morte*. Baptism welcomed the Christian into the faith, and opened the door so they could receive the other six Sacraments. Christening, the naming part of the Sacrament of Baptism, appears to be almost interchangeable in the text for Baptism, though christening is not in and of itself a Sacrament. "Christen" is mentioned in the *Morte* nearly 50 times, and a surprising 29 of those are in the first ten books, before the Grail Quest even begins. Arthur himself is the first to partake of the Sacraments in the pages of the *Morte* when he is christened in the care of Sir Ector (Field 5.28). A few of the other mentioned christenings are that of Priamus (178.8), Sir Tristram's, mentioned both by his mother (290.21) and himself (307.31), and the numerous conversations urging Sir Palomides to be christened. It is right at the close of

these Pre-Grail books that Sir Palomides delivers his famous lines: (Need to find in Middle English): “I woll that ye all knowe that into this londe I cam to be crystnyed, and in my harte I am crustunde, and crystyne woll I be. But I have made suche a vowe that I may nat be crystynde tyll I have done seven trewe bataylis for Jesus sake, and then woll I be crystynde” (527.11-15). While this may appear to be a dangerous instance in which Malory is using Palomides’ mouth to denote the non-necessity of Sacraments for living a holy life, this is not the case. Palomides—not to spoil a latter chapter—ultimately is baptized and confessed, and Christine Pyle will guide us later in this analysis to how this first denial of the Sacrament ultimately leads to a more genuine Christianity. Though christening is mentioned repeatedly and associated with quite a few significant and recurring knights, Malory does not give evidence in the first ten books that it radically transforms the interior life of these knights. Lest the reader grow worried that these examples are then reduced to cultural influence and not authentic devotion—Malory gives the Sacraments this role at this point before the Quest in order to emphasize greater spiritual growth later in the *Morte*.

The most frequently mentioned Sacrament is the Sacrifice of the Mass, or the celebration of the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist as an opportunity for the faithful to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. “The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments” (CCC, 1113)—as does Malory’s work. Professor Clark’s article “Constructing the Spiritual Hierarchy through Mass Attendance in the *Morte Darthur*” is our strongest scholarship guide in exploring this Catholic Sacrament. Clark explains:

Each Mass takes only five to seven words to describe. This conventional, formulaic style of describing Mass might impress on audiences a habitual, ritual nature to Mass attendance...Because Malory records them formulaically, these Masses help establish the perception that many knights exercise spiritual discipline by regularly attending Mass. (135)

This observation holds true especially for the Masses celebrated before the Grail Quest. Malory uses such phrases as “whan the servyce was done” (Field 8.1), “uppon the morne they herde Mass and dyned” (239.20), and “he harde masse and brake his faste” (141.27). before he expounds upon the details of another adventure. Malory is very deliberate in illustrating that the knights always attend Mass first, observing a fast beforehand, before partaking in a day of winning worship, jousting in tourneys, aiding damsels, or even opening letters. Even from the outset of the *Morte*, the Archbishop instructs those praying for a king “no man touche the suerd tyll the hyghe masse be all done” (7.19-20). Throughout the *Morte*, “Malory suggests that participation in Christian worship is central to knighthood” (“Constructing Spiritual Hierarchy 135), and this relationship begins when the *Morte* does, subtle but strong. Though the Mass is not described or expounded upon in these books, the importance of the Sacrament of the Mass is emphasized even before the Grail Quest begins.

The Sacraments of Confession, Holy Orders, and Matrimony reside within the Pre-Grail Quest, though more obscurely than the other Sacraments. Marriage appears only a few times; Uther Pendragon and Igraine, (Field 4.16) or Sir Tristram and La Beale Isoud (348.9), to name a few. Though marriage is scarce, Holy Orders are nearly nonexistent. It appears that only Sir Pedivere undertakes the priestly vocation and receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders in the Pre-Grail Quest books (221.7-8). Maybe it is more fitting that Malory begins with the Sacrament of beginning, in Baptism, but does

not yet employ the Sacraments regarding the vocation of his characters. Confession is slightly more frequent than marriage and Holy Orders in the Pre-Grail Quest books. The first such instance is in the prayerful gathering by the Archbishop to find a new king. Many of the lords there “made hem clene of her lyf, that her prayer myghte be the more acceptable unto God” (7.4-6). It seems, however, that most instances in the Pre-Grail Quest referring to forgiveness and even confession are not related to the Sacrament. When searching the word “confess”, it only occurs five times, and only one involves the Sacrament. The word “penance” appears only three times, and also transpires outside of the Sacrament. “Forgive” is mentioned over twenty times, yet most instances specify the forgiveness of man as opposed to the forgiveness of God: “forygff me all that I have mysseseyde or done ayenste you” (242.7-8) or “I beseche you of your mercy that ye woll forygff her” (292.25-6). Malory’s audience would have recognized this language to be related to the Sacrament of Confession and would likely note the subsequent absence of the Sacrament with its use. Malory indicates the importance of the forgiveness of men in the Pre-Grail Quest, but not God—yet. The Sacrament of Confession will become much more significant to the *Morte* as the tale continues; in the Pre-Grail Quest, Malory only begins to introduce its gravity.

The *Morte* not only includes but exemplifies in abundance the Sacraments of the Catholic faith. Malory either inserts or preserves these numerous references to these Sacraments and subsequently highlights their importance to the work as a whole. The instances before the Grail Quest are conveyed quietly, but meaningfully, and allow for an opportunity for deeper spiritual growth for the characters as the tale progresses.

Tradition: Clergy

Hermits, priests, and “holy” men abound in the pages of the *Morte*, but their specific vocation is another underdeveloped area of Arthurian research. Though “the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly” (CCC 1546) in imitation of Christ in His roles as priests, prophet, and king, the clergy’s imitation of this role holds a deeper gravity. The words “priest”, “hermit”, and “holy man” collectively are mentioned only 32 times in the books preceding the Grail Quest, as compared to the 212 mentions in the rest of the work. Of the clergy, Bishops, Cardinals, and Popes especially were historically and politically powerful, as witnessed in the *Morte*, but the clergy are additionally significant in these Pre-Grail books in that they provide places for physical healing for the knights. Where Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, published a hundred years prior, depicts the Church clergy as corrupt, immoral, and scheming, the *Morte* portrayal is completely the opposite. The priests, bishops, and other holy men in the *Morte* aid the knights on their adventures and guide them within their spiritual journey. In this way, Malory establishes the clergy’s role of essential counselors and healers that he will expand in later books of the *Morte*.

Clergy held positions of power when it came to the political order. The first clergy witnessed in the *Morte* offer a perfect example—the Archbishop of Canterbury sends for all the gentlemen of arms to come to London so that they might uncover which man is to be crowned the next king. When the sword in the stone appears, the people marvel, and then right away “told it to the archebisshop” (Field 7.17). In response to this, the Archbishop “commande” the community to continue in prayer before addressing the

sword in the stone (7.18). And the crowd listens. Malory does not employ any kind of skepticism or defiance on behalf of the people; they easily and trustingly defer to the Archbishop's wisdom and authority. The archbishop urges them not to lose hope when at first none can pull the sword from the stone, but exhorts them that "doubte not God will make hym knowen" (7.26). And again, the people trust his council. This is merely the first, but not the only, instance in which the Church hierarchy's authority is heeded and respected. It is no less than the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, who crowns Arthur as emperor (188.4). King Mark impersonates the Pope in letters to Sir Tristram because such a title held significant potential to influence political decisions and individual behavior (535.6-8). Malory does not choose to belittle or downplay the role of the Catholic clergy; he describes them as influential and respectable leaders.

The clergy, in the Catholic tradition, are necessary for the celebration of the Sacraments; Malory, being a faithful medieval Christian, demonstrates this. Typically, the medieval Christians on adventures will say something akin to: "Now wille ye sende for a preest, that we may receyve our sacrament and receyve the blessid body of our Lord Jesu Cryst?" (73.20-1). What is being described here is known as last rites, which constitutes the three Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick; the "Sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland" (CCC 1525). Last rites are mentioned within the *Morte* numerous times, which requires that a priest be present, even if Malory does not explicitly mention the presence of a priest. Malory does, however, directly include a member of the clergy in his mention of the Sacrament of matrimony: "And upon Myghelmas Day the Bysshop of Caunterbyry made the weddyng betwene Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse with grete solempnyté" (286.3-5). Though not as crucial as

the Sacraments, the clergy also hold the capacity for powerful prayers and blessings for and upon their flock. Malory also includes this aspect of their vocation in the *Morte*: “Than the Bysshop of Caunturbiry was fette, and he blyssed the segis with grete royalté and devocion” (77.30-31). Malory’s experience as a medieval Christian gives him the knowledge of the clergy’s role within the Church, and his work ultimately does not hide or vilify their vocation; instead, the *Morte* exhibits it with authentic devotion and piety.

The clergy’s most significant role in the Pre-Grail Books falls not in their political prowess, however, but in their willingness and ability to heal the knights physically while the knights seek adventure. This occurs frequently within the Pre-Grail Quest section. Sir Tristram, in his madness, is cared for at a hermitage by a hermit who takes his sword and replaces it with meat (393.6-9). Sir Palomydes and Sir Epyngrys “rode untyll an ermytage, and there Sir Epyngrys rested hym” (607.19). Sir Tor and a dwarf “com to the hermytage and toke such lodgyng as was there” (89.16-17). Kynge Pellynor takes a dead knight to a hermitage to be buried and to charge the hermit with taking care of the knight’s soul, to which the hermit willingly responds “Hit shall be done...as I woll answer to God” (96.27-8). King Arthur himself “had well rested hym at the abbey” (121.22). Sir Gawaine, too, “com unto an abbey of monkys, and there were well logged” (122.34-123.1). After battling one another, Sir Lamerok and Sir Bellyaunce go “to an abbey faste by” (359.4), and remain there until they are both healed physically and reconciled with one another. Overall, it can be seen from these few examples that the *Morte* depicts hermitages and abbeys as undisputed places of refuge for the knights. In these books, the clergy are associated with physical rest and healing—but Malory will later deepen their role to a spiritual level. While the magnitude of the clergy’s association

with healing manifests in later books, Malory sets the precedent of physical healing and rest within these Pre-Grail Quest books.

Grounding the Pillars

The Pre-Grail Quest books, overall, lay the groundwork for Catholicism through the rest of the *Morte*. The implementation of Scripture, Feast Days, the Sacraments, and the clergy illustrate an authentic Catholicism; however, they are not the only indicators of a strong faith. Malory includes specific liturgical details within the Pre-Grail Quest books: the Liturgy of the Hours (matins, for example, in 272.18), or the Tabernacle candle that is always burning to indicate the presence of Christ in the Tabernacle (“entyrde into the chapel. And there he sawe no lyght but a dymme lamp brenning” 215.19), or prayers for the dead in their journey to reach Heaven. The Catholic details I analyze in this section enhance the idea that Malory’s *Morte* is genuinely Christian. The practices in this section are authentic, though they focus more upon external celebrations rather than internal reflections. It is not until deeper into the *Morte*, however, that Malory indicates the internal implications of these external practices. Scripture and Tradition, even before the Grail Quest begins, are prevalent and authentic, and they create a foundation for an even richer faith.

CHAPTER THREE

The Grail Quest

Introduction

“The Tale of the Sankgreal...a tale cronyclod for one of the trewyst and of the holyest that ys in this worlde” (789.14-16). Seeking the Eucharist, appearances from Saints, a Mass with Christ Himself—the Grail Quest is one of the most theologically vibrant and rich parts of the *Morte D’Arthur*. This section, Books 11 through 17 of Caxton’s edition, or simply “The Sankgreal”, is termed “The Grail Quest” in my exploration here. The tale centers upon Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, Sir Percival, and Sir Lancelot, among others, as they earnestly search for the chalice which first held Christ’s Body at the Last Supper—or the Sangreal. As the names “Pre” and “Post” of my other two chapters imply, this search for Christ in the Grail Quest is the heart of the *Morte*—the rest of the text depends upon the Quest for the Sangreal. Though Malory’s Catholicism in the Pre-Grail Quest books is expressed abundantly, the Grail Quest is essential for guiding the knights into deeper interior transformation.

The Grail Quest, prevalent in the scarce scholarship surrounding Arthurian Christianity, prompts strongly opposing viewpoints regarding the authenticity of its faith. The first great editor in the twentieth century, Eugene Vinaver, insists upon the *Morte’s* lack of spiritual focus, even in the Grail Quest. Dorsey Armstrong summarizes Vinaver’s viewpoint, asserting that “Malory is not interested primarily in contrasting ‘earthly’ and ‘divine’ chivalry ‘and condemning the former’; rather, the Grail Quest is seen by Vinaver

as an ‘opportunity offered to the knights of the Round Table to achieve still greater glory in this world’” (“Malory and Character” 160). Some scholars strongly advocate that Malory “valorizes and eulogizes the earthly deeds and worship of the secular, noble fellowship. Even in the Grail Quest, authors like K.S. Whetter believe that Malory favors secular concerns over a reverently Christian theme” (*Malory and Christianity* 7). Though many scholars, in the time since Professor Vinaver, have dismissed the Grail Quest on the grounds of its perceived secularism, other scholars have begun to advocate and admire the religiosity within the Grail Quest.

Malory himself outlines the Grail Quest as being the holiest tale within the *Morte* (789.14-16). Radulescu agrees, succinctly writing that it is “the most religious of Malory’s tales” (“Spiritual Malory” 211). She says that “the Sankgreal can be considered a cornerstone for Malory’s *Arthuriad*” (216). Other scholars, such as P.J.C. Field, oppose Vinaver’s conclusion of mere chivalric spirituality and instead “suggests this emphasis on worship in the Sankgreal still accommodates both spiritual and chivalric merit at this point” (224). Field upholds this opinion in his research, aligning the importance of the Grail Quest both with its distinct Catholicism and a deep transformation:

There is no doubt that Malory understood the need to show his contemporaries a version of the Grail that would resonate with their beliefs of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In this moment, as in other parts of the Sankgreal, an orthodox view of religion and spirituality emerges, one that does not resonate with the more secular concerns of glory and prowess in arms elsewhere in the *Morte*. To be granted a vision of the Holy Grail takes more than abiding by the rules of the Round Table; *it implies a deeper, and personal*, rather than collective, understanding of faith and a pursuit of holiness and purity (“Spiritual Malory” 225, emphasis mine).

As Radulescu writes, based on Field’s findings, a personal and deeper faith emerges within the Grail Quest. Other scholars agree; though they may not state it explicitly, they,

too, recognize the Grail Quest as the means of spiritual transformation. "...the readers of the *Morte* experience the spiritual import of the adventures, and then the dénouement of the Grail Quest" (212). A dénouement implies a climax; a crucial point in a journey. Radulescu writes that "the Sankgreal has been considered *an indispensable bridge* between the early tales, which establish Arthur's reign and the reputations of his individual knights, and the later ones, when the Round Table fellowship collapses" (212, emphasis mine). The Grail Quest is, indeed, an indispensable bridge, and one that I believe is in dire need of more recognition. I will continue the exploration of these scholars' writings and advocate for the Grail Quest's deep spirituality. Malory shapes Scriptural allusions, Feast Days, the Sacraments, and the role of priests within the Grail Quest so that they take on deeper hues and more significant spiritual roles than before. I will exemplify, through these four pathways enveloped within Scripture and Tradition, that the *Morte*—and the Grail Quest especially—are deeply authentic and profoundly Catholic.

Scripture

Scripture, while appearing more in the form of vague allusions prior to the Grail Quest, takes on greater weight once the Quest begins. Scripture becomes not only more notable within the text, but more important to the tale—Malory places direct mentions of and allusions to Scripture in the mouths of his characters. Though the Grail Quest is ample in its use of Scripture, the only scholarship that mentions it refers to it merely in passing. Radulescu writes of the first appearance of the Grail Quest: "This initial moment of fellowship, understood as the brotherhood among the Round Table knights now confirmed as elect by the descent of the Holy Spirit...The temporary brightness of their

faces points not only to a biblical comparison, but also to the inner composure and stability...” (217). An analysis of this moment appears below. This moment is one of the few that has received attention from scholars for Scriptural richness. Within the Grail Quest, Scriptural allusions are not mere echoes—they are resounding voices.

One such voice comes directly to Lancelot in his search for the Sangreal. “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!” (Field 694.30-33). Comparing Lancelot to such images is Biblical, but not complimentary. The reference to stone could be a reference to the heart of stone that currently resides in Lancelot that illustrates that of Ezekiel 36:26: “And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh” (*Vulgate*, Ez 36:26). The bitterness of wood immediately recalls the wood of the Cross, the most bitter wood in all of Scripture, made especially bitter by the wood from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The fig tree is perhaps the most obvious reference, as Christ curses the barren fig tree in the Gospel of Matthew: “And seeing a certain fig tree by the way side, he came to it and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he saith to it: ‘May no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.’ And immediately the fig tree withered away” (*Vulgate*, Mt 21:19). Shortly after hearing this voice, Lancelot encounters a hermit, and he explains these allusions to him bluntly (Field 697.1-33). These direct Scriptural comparisons affect Lancelot in a way not witnessed prior to the Grail Quest: they change his heart. “All that ye have sayde ys trew, and frome hensforwarde I caste me, by the grace of God, never to be so wycked as I have bene” (697.34-5, 698.1). Lancelot grapples time and time again to allow his heart to be made fully flesh and not

fully stone (or maybe less fleshly); this moment is neither the first, nor the last for this struggle. Malory nonetheless uses this moment to connect Scripture with a rekindled desire for spiritual renewal in Lancelot.

Interestingly enough, this voice of Scripture confuses Lancelot; he “bethought hym what he had sene there and whether hit were dremys or nat” (694.28-9). This is not a lone circumstance. Scriptural richness in the Grail Quest is found and enhanced rather prominently through a newfound inclusion of dreams and visions. Dreams and visions are mentioned over forty times in the Grail Quest, and Malory uses them nearly interchangeably, for example, “whan he was aslepe there cam a vision unto hym” (770.6). Compelling references and potential allusions to Scripture in the Grail Quest abound within the work, some of the obvious connections are drawn by Malory himself through the interpretations of dreams and visions.

Not only are dreams and visions connected to Scripture in the Grail Quest, but they attain their significance firstly as a means of learning information within the Bible itself. In the book of Genesis, Jacob sees in a dream what is known as a ladder to Heaven being ascended and descended by angels (*Vulgate*, Gen 28:12), and a few books later, the Lord tells Jacob directly to return home (*Vulgate*, Gen 31:10-13). Joseph in the Old Testament, as a dream interpreter, has the largest number of dreams associated with him. His own dreams of grain and stars foretell that his family will depend upon him (*Vulgate*, Gen 37:1-10), which occurs long after the dreams happen. He interprets the dreams of his cupbearer and baker prison cellmates, and their respective dreams indicate their different fates (*Vulgate*, Gen 40). Through Pharaoh’s dreams of the cows and the shocks, Joseph prophesies that Egypt will undergo seven years of famine after their seven years of

abundance (*Vulgate*, Gen 41). The early chapters of Daniel present lesser-known dreams associated with Nebuchadnezzar's immoral kingship (chapters 2 and 4). The Joseph of the New Testament, too, listens to God's plan as it is given to him through dreams. He is tasked to protect the Christ-child by not separating from Mary (*Vulgate*, Mat 1:18-24), fleeing to Egypt (*Vulgate*, Mat 2:13), and returning to Bethlehem (*Vulgate*, Mat 2:19). Even Pontius Pilate's wife suffered a dream with which she warns Pilate of Jesus' innocence (*Vulgate*, Mat 27:19). Biblically, dreams contain substantial significance in their ability to communicate information. Though the *Morte* does not echo specific dreams in the Bible, Malory employs them in much the same way: they uncover spiritual knowledge about the knights on the Grail Quest.

One of the many dreams in the Grail Quest is had by Sir Percival. He has a "mervaylous dreme; that too ladys mette with hym, and that one sate uppon a lyon, and that the other sate uppon a serpente" (Field 706.27-29). The lady on the lion warns Percival that he is about to fight with a strong opponent, and the lady on the serpent chastises him for killing her serpent. When Percival awakes, he happens upon a holy old man, whom he asks for guidance. The man explains that the woman on the lion is the "New Law of the Holy Church" (708.13); the other woman is the Old Law, riding a fiend from hell in the likeness of a serpent. The man explains that Percival's making the sign of the cross—the Catholic opening to every prayer invoking God in His Three Persons—was all it took to slay the demon (708.27). Percival's dream is not a verbal echo of a Scriptural battle, but a foretelling of his own spiritual struggle. This moment, akin to many other dreams and visions in the Grail Quest, incorporates spiritual matters that are

not allusions, but direct comparisons. Malory embraces this tradition of dreams holding Biblical significance, while simultaneously placing Biblical connections within them.

Malory includes many dreams with subsequent aid from holy clergy. Sir Ector has a vision of Sir Lancelot midway through the Grail Quest. Another dream relates to the purity of the Grail Quest Knights. Lancelot, too, as a dream regarding the Quest, and Sir Bors suffers many dreams about nature. All of these dreams, in one way or another, relate to the spiritual state of knights or to other direct spiritual matters. Hermits, holy men, and priests all guide the knights in interpreting these dreams and aiding them in what to do next. These Scriptural echoes—or voices—rise to a more direct role in the Grail Quest, and prompt the knights to deeper spirituality. Such dreams provide opportunities for the knights to search into their own hearts, to self-reflect in the midst of their outward Grail-seeking.

Dreams are not the only Scriptural allusions in the Grail Quest. Galahad, the holiest knight of the Grail Quest, is directly compared to Jesus Himself many times. In addition to those direct identifications, Galahad also takes after Mary in her Assumption or in Christ's Ascension when he is assumed at the end of the Grail Quest. Professor Clark writes that Galahad's assumption is the most climatic spiritual experience in 'The Quest of the Holy Grail' and possible the *Morte Darthur*" ("Spiritual Hierarchy" 143). Though the *Morte* includes many Scriptural connections, Malory is not subtle in his correlation between Galahad and various powerful moments in Scripture.

One last instance I will explore within Malory's Scriptural allusions is the comparison between the Prophet Simeon and King Evelake. King Evelake, after much trial, cries out to the Lord: "Than thys kynge cryed mercy and seyde, 'Fayre Lorde, lat

me never dye tyll the good knyght of my blood of the nyneth degré be com, that I may se hym opynly that shall encheve the Sankgreall and that I myght kysse hym” (Field 702.19-22). His words echo those of Simeon: “And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord” (*Vulgate*, Lk 2:26). Both of these men desire to see the promise of the Lord be fulfilled, and both of their desires are realized. King Evelake dies in the arms of Sir Galahad, and Simeon cradles the Christ-Child in his arms. Here is yet another moment where, even subliminally, Galahad is being compared as a Christ-figure. Malory, however, does not include Simeon solely in this comparison. “There was the tombe of Joseph of Aramathyys son and the thome of Symyan, where Sir Launcelot had fayled” (780.4-5). Where Galahad is the fulfillment of the Simeon-like king’s prophecy, Sir Lancelot fails at his very tomb. The spiritual differences between father and son are further highlighted here; however, it does not preclude them from both ultimately sharing in the same eternal life.

Scriptural references and spiritual matters accumulate in the Grail Quest abundantly. Some allusions directly draw the characters to reflect on the state of their soul; some draw comparisons subtly. Malory utilizes this Catholic pillar to enrich his tale, and to deepen the faiths of his characters in their Grail Quest.

Tradition: Feast Days

Malory intentionally aligns Catholic Feast Days with critical and similar plot points prior to the Grail Quest; however, once the Grail Quest begins, the mentions of Feast Days decreases. That is not to say that the Catholic liturgical calendar does not hold any further importance within the *Morte*; rather, the focus is turned away from the

passing of time to the spiritual growth that is taking place as time passes. Pentecost, also referred to as Whitsunday, is mentioned a total of 18 times. Candlemas and Michaelmas, the only other two feast days included explicitly in the Grail Quest, appear once each. Despite their more brief acknowledgement by comparison to the Pre-Grail Quest, Malory still uses Catholic Feast Days in significant moments while still turning the awareness of his audience toward the internal, and ultimately, the eternal.

Pentecost remains the most oft-mentioned and important feast day within the *Morte*, even as the focus of the tale shifts within the Grail Quest. Most mentions of this feast follow in the same route as before in Chapter One: either encouraging the spirit of the Christian mission, or invitations to and celebrations of the feast day. The first hint of the Grail Quest, and the beginning of what I deem in this chapter the start of the Grail Quest, falls on none other than Pentecost: “Afore the tyme that Sir Galahad was begotyn or borne, there cam in an ermyte unto Kynge Arthure upon Whitsonday...thys same yere he shall be bygotyn that shall sytte in that Syege Perelous, and he shall wyne the Sankgreall” (Field 620.5-7, 17-19). The first mention of the Sangreal in the *Morte* takes place on the feast of Pentecost, and this feast continues to be one of the most important to the Grail Quest as the quest progresses.

It is only fitting that the Grail Quest itself officially begins on the Feast of Pentecost. The day begins with the king and queen going to their service for Whitsunday (667.9), and continues with a golden-scripted prophecy on the Siege Perilous and another sword in a stone bobbing in the water. Malory then depicts the moment of the Grail’s first appearance in Camelot akin to the appearance of Christ in what seems to be the first Pentecost in the unique retelling style of the Gospel of John. “Now when it was late the

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...' When He had said this, He breathed on them; and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (*Vulgate*, Jn 20:19, 22). Malory, too, writes that "all the doorys and wyndowes of the paleyse shutte by themselff" (Field 669.16-17). And, when Galahad enters with the old man, he says "Pees be with you, fayre lords!" (Field 669.27). In the more widely-accepted Pentecost telling in the book of Acts, there is a sudden "sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming: and it filled the whole house where they were sitting" (*Vulgate*, Acts 2:2). In Camelot, when the knights sit down to dinner, there is also a "crakynge and cryynge of thundir, that hem through the paylse should all to-dryve. So in the myddys of the blast entyrde a sonnebeame...and all they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste" (Field 673.29-33). Then, the Holy Grail itself appears to the Round Table knights for the first time (674.2-7). Once it disappears, Gawain declares that "I shall laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall" (674.18), and other knights follow suit. The Round Table, it seems, is blessed with an experience of Pentecost that parallels that of the Apostles at the first Pentecost. As mentioned before, this moment is one of the few in scholarship that links Malory's work to Scripture (see page 29 of this thesis). The large difference between the two is only that the Apostles are given the ability to speak in tongues (*Vulgate*, Acts 2:4) and the knights are struck dumb (Field 673.35 – 6741). This same Pentecost, Malory later mentions, is the very same on which Palomides is finally christened (664.4-5). This instance, more than the others in the Grail Quest, indicates not only the importance of the feast throughout, but of the

significance of the Grail Quest overall through this richly Biblical “reverence of thys hygh feste of Pentecost” (674.13).

As the Quest continues, as Radulescu writes and P.C.J. Field argues, “the Sankgreal draws attention to the meaningful association between Galahad, Lancelot and the spiritual feast of togetherness, Pentecost” (“Spiritual Malory” 218). Radulescu’s reference to it as a “spiritual feast of togetherness” further illuminates the importance of its inclusion throughout the rest of the Grail Quest. Though the rest of the references pale in comparison to the Grail’s first appearance to the Round Table, Malory continues to highlight the importance of Pentecost above the other Christian feasts. Within the Grail Quest, Malory exemplifies and conjoins the spirit of the Christian mission with the celebration of its feast day.

Though the feasts of Michaelmas and Candlemas are incorporated less often than before the Grail Quest, they still serve the same purpose: commemorating the events celebrated on those feast days and emphasizing the importance of these feasts to the lives of Medieval Christians. Candlemas—the Feast of the Presentation at the Temple—is the day on which Sir Caster, King Pelles’ nephew, is made a knight (Field 648.27-30). Caster could in his own way, then, be presenting himself to the Lord for his new life on Christian mission as a knight. This feast can thus serve to show that events such as tourneys and knightings still take place on feast days, though the reader be witnessing the Grail Quest and not the courtly life and earthly adventures as before. The Feast of St. Michael, or Michaelmas, is used to mark the passage of time. “For Sir Gawayne rode from Whytsontyde tylle Mychaelmasse” (721.5). This more subtle moment conveys the importance with which the knights hold the Church calendar, for even the distance of

travel is conveyed by the passage of feast days. Though these two feasts are not included at largely climactic moments in the Grail Quest, their seeming insignificance reminds the audience that the knights viewed even smaller moments within the light of the Church calendar.

Malory now wields Feast Days with a double-edged goal: to continue his prior emphasis on the significance of Church Feast Days as well as to signify a shift within the Grail Quest overall from the external to the internal. The Catholic Tradition of Feast Days is present, and though it is not as common as it is before the Grail Quest, it is just as significant in quality. The large number of feast days is reduced, but the internal quality behind them has grown. Though marked by the Church calendar, the gaze of the reader is, like that of the knights, fixed on the Grail.

Tradition: The Sacraments

The *Morte's* shift from external observations to their internal implications is marked with special gravity when it comes to Malory's inclusion of the Sacraments in the Grail Quest. The Grail Quest includes four of the seven Catholic Sacraments, and they are bountiful and impactful in ways beyond the examples that appeared prior to the Quest. Penance or Confession, and the Eucharist are all incorporated in considerable amounts, and are joined by the more hidden mentions of Baptism and Anointing of the Sick as it is encompassed in Last Rites. All four of these Sacraments depict Malory's deep Catholic spirituality and reveal the ways that they serve the purpose for which they were established: the Sacraments provide the knights with adventures and growth not only in the world, but in the battle for their very hearts.

The sacrament of Baptism for most Catholics occurs at the beginning of their lives. 19 mentions of baptisms and christenings appear in the Grail Quest, and most refer to Sir Palomides finally permitting himself to receive the Sacrament. It is so important that Field sets it apart as its own seven page chapter (658-664). In Medieval Christianity, most were christened shortly after birth; it was uncommon for one such as Palomides to be baptized later in his life, but a new life was nonetheless promised. “Than the suffrygan let fylle a grete vessel with watyr, and whan he had hallowed hyt he than confessed clene Sir Palomydes. And Sir Trystam and Sir Galleron were hys too godfadyrs” (663.33). Christine Pyle explains that Sir Palomides’ baptism ultimately reveals the spiritual growth and conversion within the *Morte*. She explores a ‘discord-unity-discord’ pattern throughout the work, and sees this baptism as a part of this theme. She concludes that Palomides, “a famously conflicted character, exemplifies this pattern. Resolving his conflicts through the Sacraments of confession and baptism, Palomides achieves full unity by the end” (22). Baptism, for Palomides, is a large pathway to spiritual maturation, and ultimately, allows him to achieve greater unity by receiving the Sacrament.

Though the Sacrament of Confession is included in the Pre-Grail Quest books, the knights seem to partake of it more so out of a sense of obligation than from sincerity of heart—not so in the Grail Quest. Lancelot’s inability to progress in his outward and inward quest for Christ is hindered by his lack of a complete Confession, and is subsequently aided when he partakes in this Sacrament. This Sacrament, especially, leads the Christian to turn inward to gaze on the heart, and Malory employs Confession for this very thing for his Lancelot. It does not always, however, as Radulescu notes result in action. “That Gawain does not gain any spiritual understanding during the Grail Quest is

due to his stubborn resistance to Christian rules. He is willing to go to confession, but will not make amends or change his life sufficiently to join the ranks of the Grail knights and see the Grail openly” (“Spiritual Malory” 223). Nonetheless, this Sacrament begins Lancelot’s inward conversion that will slowly begin to flourish.

Of the four Sacraments in the Grail Quest, the Mass easily surpasses the others in its repeated mention, profound spirituality, and effect on the characters’ spiritual growth. Each Mass is, fundamentally, a Grail Quest; the faithful come on their own journey in search of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Masses within the Grail Quest thus take on a more powerful tone, and the most spiritual moments within the entire *Morte* happen within the Sacrifice of the Mass. The most powerful Mass celebrated in the Grail Quest is where Christ Himself administers the Eucharist to the Grail Quest knights. “Than toke He Hymselff the holy vessell and came to Sir Galahad. And he kneled adowne and resseyved hys Saveoure. And aftir hym so ressayved all hys felowis, and they thought hit so sweete that hit was mervaylous to telle” (783.21-24). This is what happens in every Mass spiritually; the Grail Knights are blessed to experience it physically. Clark summarizes the goal of the entire Grail Quest to be one such deep experience: “In essence, then, the adventures of the Grail knights constitute a physical and metaphorical quest for a deeper understanding of the mass that will result from interacting with a legendary Eucharistic vessel” (“Construction Through Spiritual Hierarchy” 129). Catholics receive the Eucharist in order to become more like Christ -- so, too, do the knights receive Him and undergo great spiritual transformation. As Christ Himself says, “My knyghtes and my servauntes and my trew children which bene com oute of dedly lyff into the spirituall lyff, I woll no lenger cover me frome you” (783.15-18).

Tradition: Clergy

“Now go we,’ seyde Sir Ector, ‘unto som ermyte that woll telle us of our avision, for hit semyth me we laboure all in waste” (Field 725.13-15). The holy men of the *Morte*—the hermits, priests, and bishops—advance beyond the role of physical healers to that of spiritual healers in the Grail Quest. They still aid the knights physically—Lancelot recuperates at a hermitage after fighting a boar (647.18-23); a larger example being when the hermit gives his life to protect Bors (744.23-745.5). The importance of the Grail Quest is that these men are no longer confined to mere physical aid. The books before the Grail Quest also exemplify the political influence of the clergy (see page 23 of this thesis), but that role, too, recedes and is replaced by a spiritual influence. The clergy’s spiritual guidance manifests itself in a few ways: sharing insights about the future, interpreting the meaning of the dreams and visions (those discussed above) and celebrating the Sacraments (most notably, Confession). The spiritual transformation I see in the *Morte* owes itself in part to the role the holy men take in shaping the faith of the knights in the Grail Quest.

Malory employs hermits as information-bearers to the knights numerous times in numerous places throughout the Grail Quest. Malory does not indicate how these holy men come across the information that they have—but none of the characters question its origin, or its truthfulness. One such instance appears a few short lines into the beginning of the Grail Quest books. And, it seems, the hermit’s only purpose is to share the future with King Athur’s court. Upon seeing the Siege Perilous and discovering that the court does not know who will sit there, the hermit says, “Then wote I... for he that shall sytte there ys yet unborne and unbegotyn, and this same year he shall be begotyn that shall

sytte in that Syege Perelous, and he shall wyne the Sankgreall.’ When this ermyte had made this mencion he departed frome the courte of Kynge Arthure” (620.16-21). His appearance lasts a mere fifteen of lines; yet, his presence is necessary for the knights to know this crucial foreshadowing. Nacien, one of the only named hermits in the Grail Quest, is another example. He sends word to Camelot that the Grail knights must be chaste on this quest, for “he that ys nat clene of hys synnes he shall nat se the mysteryes of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste” (675.28-29). His warning is a true one, and the reader sees it come to fruition. Another instance is the priest that meets Galahad and Gawain upon their arrival at the Castle of Maidens; he explains the backstory of the Castle and shares why the community within it is in need of his assistance (691.8-26). These are just a few of the many moments in which hermits, priests, and other clergy exemplify this new identity as bearers of information. Malory overall associates the Catholic clergy as receiving and sharing this information, and the knights ultimately trust them and their insights.

Malory’s holy men bestow information prompted and unprompted. The knights receive a variety of dreams and visions while on the Grail Quest, as I explored above; in order to understand the significance of each of these dreams, the knights repeatedly turn to the holy men. This section began with words from Sir Ector that express this very idea—the knights “labor in waste” (725.15) when they could instead be assured of guidance if they seek out a hermit. Lancelot receives a dream of an old man descending from Heaven to speak to knights and kings in their prayer (717.7-24). When Lancelot meets a hermit on the road, he expounds upon this dream to him, to which the hermit reveals that Galahad is Lancelot’s son, and both men belong to a high lineage of holy men (718.14-719.6). When Bors experiences strange dreams of white flowers, birds, and

a rotten tree, he, too, implores an Abbot for guidance (741.23-742.32). The Abbot not only explains the dream to Bors, but advises him on what he should do in response to the dream. Another hermit clarifies what Sir Gawain's dreams of the bulls implies (727.23-728.32), yet another defines the difference between the Old Law and the New Law to Sir Percival after they appear to him in a dream (708.13-16). All the knights on the Grail Quest receive strange, spiritual dreams; all find clarity and guidance in the holy men they encounter on the way.

It is not just the knights that acknowledge the spiritual impact of the holy men in the *Morte*—demons notice too, and attempt to use this role to lead the knights astray. Bors comes across a “man clothed in a religious wede, and rode on a stronge blacke horse, blacker than a byry” (737.30-31), and Bors asks him for guidance, just as the knights are accustomed to do: “‘Sir,’ seyde Sir Bors, be ye a preyst?’ ‘Yea forsothe,’ seyde he. ‘Than I pray you telle me a dreame that befelle me the laste nyght.’ ‘Say on,’ seyde he” (738.19-23). This “man clothed in a religious wede” — Malory intentionally does not use the word “hermit” or “holy man” — interprets Bors’ dream as indicating that the maintenance of chastity is a sinful desire for worldly glory (738.33-35). This man also tells Bors that his brother, Lionel, is dead, and the two bury him together (738.1-15). When Bors shortly thereafter refuses a lady who threatens to jump from a window, the entire situation is revealed as a ruse. An Abbot later explains to Bors the reality behind his dreams, and uncovers the truth that the “man clothed in a religious wede” was a fiend. Dreams and visions can thus either be means of information or means of manipulation, depending on who the knights approach. Malory uses this instance to associate the real clergy with truth, and demons with false information. He depicts the true holy men,

within the Grail Quest, as trustworthy and insightful advisors to guide the knights in their spiritual journeys.

Aside from interpreting dreams and foretelling the future, Malory further depicts the Catholic clergy as authentic spiritual fathers by illustrating them directly as advisors in the faith. Lancelot, specifically, converses with and begs counsel from various hermits on his spiritual journey in the Grail Quest, and they each guide him in various ways toward internal reflection and an eternal perspective. One hermit hears when Lancelot “kneled downe and cryed on Oure Lorde mercy for hys wycked workys” (695.21-22), and when Lancelot “prayde hym [the hermit] for seynte charité for to hyre his lyff” (695.23-4), or to hear his Confession, the hermit responds kindly: “With a good wylle” (695.25). Lancelot “hyde[s] none olde synne” (696.13) from the hermit, and the hermit, in turn, reminds him of the reality of his sin, but of the deeper reality of God’s mercy. The hermit assures Lancelot that, despite his sins and regret, the Lord loves him and has bestowed many gifts upon him:

For hit semyth well God lovith you...in all the worlde men shall nat fynde one knyght to whom Oure Lorde hath yveyn so much of grace as He hath lente the, for He hathe yeffyn the fayrenes with semelyunes, also He hath yevyn the wytte, and discession to know good frome evil, He hath given thee prouess and hardinesse, and gevyn the to worke so largely that thou hast had the bettir all thy days of thy lyff wheresomever thou cam...(697.2, 9-15)

Another hermit notes that Lancelot could see the Grail if he were not “longe on youre synne” (716.7). This causes Lancelot to weep and he asks, “Fadir, what shall I do?” (716.15). Just as the prior hermit did, this holy man does not ignore the state of Lancelot’s soul. This hermit, instead of speaking love into a spiritual wound, instead advises Lancelot to wear a hair shirt, attend daily Mass, and abstain from meat during the Grail Quest (716.16-22). Where the Pre-Grail Quest hermits are physical healers, the

hermits within the Grail Quest are spiritual healers. Whether the healing be a reminder of God's mercy or an encouragement to give up worldly ways, the holy men in the Grail Quest speak the truth deeply in order to minister to Lancelot's heart.

As explained in the prior chapter, Malory's experience as a medieval Christian gives him insight to the clergy's role within the Church—Malory uses this understanding to portray these holy men as helpful spiritual healers and harbingers of truth. Without these men, the spiritual journeys of the knights would be lacking in eternal perspective. I would be remiss not to mention that the Grail Quest, in its portrayal of the clergy, includes both St. Joseph of Arimathea “in the likeness of a bishop” (782.14-22) and Christ Himself, the greatest High Priest, acting as a Mass celebrant by distributing the Eucharist to the Grail knights (783.13-25). Overall, the clergy in the Grail Quest are essential to deepen the faith of the knights—they could not attempt to reach holiness without their guidance. The *Morte* does not attempt to slander or misconstrue the vocation of the Catholic clergy; instead, it highlights and celebrates the influence of these holy men with authentic devotion and piety.

External to Internal

The Quest for the Holy Grail changes the external that the knights had been seeking prior and shifts the focus to their spiritual well-being. These moments that I discuss here are by no means exhaustive. The power of the Sign of the Cross, the beginning of every Catholic prayer; the continued mention of Liturgy of the Hours, and the hidden mention of the Kiss of Peace within the Mass are additional Catholic elements that deserve more exploration. Overall, throughout the Grail Quest, Scripture brings the knights on mission in the manner of the Apostles, and the Tradition guides them to

truthfully understand the places in their hearts need God's grace. Malory uses these Catholic elements as the means through which the knights undergo spiritual purification and Transformation. Scripture and Tradition surround the essential moments of the plot, the heart of the the *Morte*; the Grail Quest would not exist without them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Post-Grail Quest

Introduction

“Here is the end of The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table” (940.17-18). After hundreds of pages, dozens of characters, and a multitude of prayers, the *Morte d’Arthur* draws to a close. This chapter analyzes Caxton’s Books 18 through 21, what I call the Post-Grail Quest—the section I believe to be the spiritual culmination of the *Morte*. Though the Grail Quest is over, the quest for holiness is not. As Radulescu says, “The constant moral battle faced by Arthurian knights in their joint pursuit of earthly glory and spiritual salvation continues well after the Sankgreal is over” (222). Though the Post-Grail Quest books burst with civil war, adulterous love, tourneys, sacrifice, and death, they also contain the most genuine love for God. The implementation of both Scripture and Tradition, as they have done throughout, reveal an authentic Catholicism as well as highlight a transformed spiritual maturity.

Though scholars have not analyzed the *Morte* through lenses of Scripture and Tradition, many who study its Christianity agree that the Post-Grail Quest books encompass moments of significant transformation. Armstrong says, “Characterization in Malory’s *Morte Darthur* is effected through changes both large and small, both dramatic and subtle, none of which can be fully appreciated *until the conclusion of the work*” (“Malory and Character” 163, emphasis mine). Such changes are, I believe, spiritual ones:

For the world of Malory's *Morte*, however, this [Lancelot turning back to sin] does not seem to mark the end of religious experiences nor the end of knightly aspiration for a holy end as expected by fifteenth-century readers. That the focus of his *Arthuriad* shifts to the holy end the crusading knights meet after a life of chivalric worship and the period when they follow Lancelot on his path to an ascetic life shows how Malory envisages that more worth can still be acquired on the hard path to spiritual salvation. ("Spiritual Malory" 226)

A conclusion that is, as Radulescu describes, unexpected by Malory's readers, they would have paid additional interest in the spiritual focus in the Post-Grail Quest. Some critics, however, claim that this religiosity is no more than a means of solving inconsistencies within the plot. These scholars "hold that the religious elements at the close of the *Morte* are plot devices providing resolutions to the oft-cited problem of divided or conflicting loyalties..." ("Christian Rituals" 77-78). I desire to disprove such a claim through one last analysis of the authenticity within the Post-Grail Quest's Scriptural allusions, Feast Days, Sacraments, and the clergy. Though even these means have undergone a transformation, Medieval Christianity and its ultimate goal of eternal life does not change.

Scripture

Scripture runs as a colorful thread in Malory's *Morte*, even unto the end of the work. Some moments are verbal echoes, as seen in the Pre-Grail Quest; others are abrupt and direct voices, as explored in the Grail Quest. One of Malory's more subtle uses of Scripture weaving the Scriptural theme of dreams as is mentioned above in the Grail Quest. Lancelot, at the end of the last tale, receives a vision that communicates to him that Guenevere is dead, and Arthur has a dream that warns him that he will die in the battle against Mordred (920.25- 921.18). In addition, Malory continues to use numbers that are Biblically significant. The number forty is associated Biblically with a season of

fasting and repentance—Jesus was tempted in the desert for forty days, God barred the Israelites from the Promised Land for forty years (*Vulgate*, Josh 5:6), and Noah waited aboard the Ark for forty days before the waters receded (*Vulgate*, Gen 7:12). Upon hearing of Guenevere's death, Lancelot refuses to eat for six weeks, or 42 days; a period just over the Biblical number for repentance. He asks for last rites by name at the completion of this fasting period, and one could argue this contributes to his final completion of absolution from his prior Confession.

Discord among the knights and civil war in Camelot, some of the recurring and larger plot points in the Post-Grail Quest books, engage with allusions from Genesis. Guenevere hosts a dinner at the beginning of the Post-Grail Quest section and Malory shares with the reader that, because of Sir Gawaine's reputation for his love of fruit (Field 793.23), the queen provides fruit for him at dinner (793.26). Unbeknownst to her, Sir Pyonell poisons the fruit; he desires that it kill Sir Gawain (793.30). Instead, the fruit falls into the hands of Sir Partryse, who dies upon eating it (794.2). The knights assume Guenevere is responsible, blame her for his death, and launch a trial against her. While this connection seems small, it is notable that, like Genesis, a mere fruit causes discord and death. This same theme appears in the final book of the *Morte*. Arthur and Mordred meet in hope of composing a treaty of peace and Mordred states that the sight of a drawn sword means war. In the midst of their negotiations, “cam oute an addir of a lytyll hethebuysshe, and hit stange a knyght in the foote...and anon he drew hys swerde to sle the addir” (922.13, 16). In Genesis, the presence of the snake leads to the fall of man, an infinite battle between God's grace in man and sin; in the *Morte*, too, the presence of the

snake leads to war. Malory, with or without intending to do so, connects the beginning of Scripture to the very end of his *Morte*.

Of the three sections analyzed in this thesis, the Post-Grail Quest has the most scholarship in which scholars link Scripture to the tale. As I have said before, none of these scholars have focused explicitly on Scriptural echoes and voices; nevertheless, they mention a few sentences within their other research and thus indicate an acknowledgement of Scripture's presence in the *Morte*. Professor Thomas Hanks, Jr. is one such scholar, and he conjoins Scripture with Lancelot's defense against Guenevere. Lancelot cries, "Jesu Chryste, be Thou my shyld and myne armoure!" (875.31-32). Hanks writes that Malory "turns his sources' highly secular event into a virtually sacred moment, adding the ideas of martyrdom and of Jesus as shield and armor. Indeed, Malory may be alluding here to Paul's admonitions to his fellow Christians in Ephesians 6:11" to "clothe yourself in the armor of God" (19). This stands out as a moment in which Lancelot is modeling Christian virtue taken straight from Scripture by obeying the instructions of St. Paul in Scripture.

The miraculous healing of Sir Urry is one of the more popular Post-Grail Quest episodes among Arthurians studying the *Morte's* Christianity; scholars both connect the healing to Scripture as well as emphasize its authentic Christianity. As Hanks puts it, "Aside from the events in the Grail Quest, the healing of Sir Urry is the most straightforwardly Christian event in the *Morte*" (16). Professor Hanks also states that this tale is "central to understanding Malory's approach to his Christian theme" (18). Sir Urry's healing is done through Lancelot's prayer, which is, as Sue Ellen Holbrook writes, the only definitive Trinitarian prayer within the hundreds of pages of the *Morte* (64). She

explains that this “Trinitarian prayer Malory composes for Lancelot is distinctly Christian and orthodox” (71). Cassian notes that the Trinitarian prayer is made “to the searcher not of voices, but of hearts” (“Endless Virtue” 64). That Lancelot’s prayer said “secretely unto hymselff” (867.22) also hints of the Gospel of Matthew: “pray to thy Father in secret, and thy father who seeth in secret will repay thee” (*Vulgate*, Mat 6:6). When Lancelot successfully heals Sir Urry through the aid of the Trinity, after no other knight is able to do so, he “wepte, as he had bene a chyld that had bene beatyn” (Field 868.1). This one line is enough for a few scholars to tie this moment to Scripture. Professor Catherine Batt “makes the connection between the image of the beaten child invoked in the context of Lancelot’s receiving mercy and grace from God and the Scriptural teaching that ‘whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth’” (Olsen 47). Holbrook, too, writes that “Lancelot, crying as abundantly as a beaten child, shows the contrite and humbled heart pleasing to God” (70). Holbrook here connects Lancelot’s tears to Psalm 50:19 (51:19, in some modern versions): “A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (*Vulgate* Ps 50:19).

The Scriptural allusions in the healing of Sir Urry, which are evident enough that scholars thought them worthy to include within other research, point to its powerful and authentic Christianity. As Hanks so eloquently says, “By this point, one has repeatedly read that Lance is the best knight ‘of a sinful man’ in the world; one now sees that his sin does not preclude God’s grace” (18). Up until this point, Lancelot has not had many Scriptural comparisons but to that of a barren fig tree (see my *Grail Quest* chapter, page 30). Now, he is the subject of a nearly Apostolic, almost Christ-like miraculous healing. Raluca Radulescu suggests that Lancelot’s spiritual growth, specifically within the Post-

Grail Quest, lifts him in such a way that Malory's medieval Christian audience would not be daunted to follow after him: "...where Lancelot broke his promise made during the Quest, he is granted a miraculous healing and a saintly end, thus fulfilling the symbolic mission of providing a model of behaviour no Galahad ever could" ("Spiritual Malory" 217-8). The healing of Sir Urry reveals a depth of spiritual growth that scholars cannot discount as being inauthentic. C.S. Lewis agrees that this episode is indeed a moment of heartfelt conversion for Lancelot; Lewis writes that Lancelot weeps at the realization that the worldly pursuits he once held so dearly fail miserably in the light of the spiritual (265). And I would be remiss not to mention that these devout behaviors and connections are not merely maintained or permitted by Malory—the healing of Sir Urry is his own creation.

One last Scriptural intimation is the ambiguous end of Arthur. Just as the circumstances of Arthur's birth reflect that of Christ, Arthur's death corresponds with His as well. Malory says—twice—that he can find no other writings on the death of Arthur (Field 928.5, 16), but that the hermit who buried him "knew nat in sertayne that he was veryly the body of Kynge Arthur" (928.19-20). This death of Arthur constitutes another location in the *Morte* where scholars have noted connections to Scripture. Professor Hanks argues that for Malory, Arthur becomes almost a Christ figure: "he has 'chaunged hys lyff', is no longer visible on earth, and is to come again, at which point a major redemptive event will occur" (21). Karen Cherewatuk states this explicitly as well. "The death for which the book is named is patterned on a biblical model: Bedivere's actions with Arthur's sword clearly recall Peter's denial of Christ, and Arthur's status as 'rex quondam rexque futuru' hints at Christological resurrection" ("Cristian Rituals" 88).

Most of the *Morte* has not yet received sufficient analysis of Malory's implementation of Scripture, either intentionally alongside his other sources or through allusion; however, some scholarship has touched on it in regard to the Post-Grail Quest. Perhaps the fact that it has been noted in the Post-Grail Quest tales, while being ignored before and during the Grail Quest, speaks to the noticeable spiritual transformation of the *Morte*. The authentic Christianity in the Post-Grail Quest shines through in its use of Scripture to the point where scholars in their other topics of research cannot ignore it. Malory uses Scripture to anchor his story Biblically; revealing Arthur as a Christ-like figure from birth to his death. Though Scripture weaves throughout Malory's design since the beginning of the *Morte*, his powerful use of Scripture in the Post-Grail Quest conveys a transformative and authentic Christianity.

Tradition: Feast Days

The Post-Grail Quest boasts of even fewer feast days than the prior sections. Whitsunday and Pentecost combined are mentioned a mere four times. Candlemas is included three times; Christmas and All Hallowmass, four each respectively; Easter, once; Assumption, twice; Michaelmas, none. Are we to think that Malory suddenly loses respect for this piece of Tradition by such a sudden reduction? Not at all—Malory aligns these feasts with events in the tale just as deliberately as before.

Most other mentions of these feast days in the Post-Grail books mainly serve as signposts marking the days of jousts, tourneys, and knightings to celebrate the day. Malory's knights even recognize the importance of a more obscure feast such as Trinity Sunday, for no fighting is permitted on that day, even in the midst of war (Field 920.7). It is, however, the great feast of Pentecost that stands out among the rest of the feasts.

Pentecost is fittingly the day that Sir Urry's mother comes into the kingdom seeking healing for her son (861.29), which is ultimately, as discussed above, significant in its rich Christian message. Malory, as I have said, often associates the events of Pentecost with the Church's spirit of mission as given to them on the first Pentecost. The Apostles, at the coming of the Holy Spirit, were given the grace to heal souls and bodies as Christ did. Lancelot, too, exemplifies this same gift on Pentecost hundreds of years later when he heals Sir Urry after the wounded knight comes into the kingdom. Lancelot lives out his Christian mission of charity to others as was first given to the Apostles at the founding of the Church on Pentecost.

There is one day in the Church Calendar, however, which only appears once within the entire *Morte*, and it does so in the Post-Grail Quest books. And this day is not a feast. Good Friday: the day of Jesus Christ's heartbreaking Passion and gruesome death on the Cross. "These foure knyghtes dyd many bataylles upon the myscreantes or Turkes. And there they dyed upon a Good Fryday for Goddes sake" (940.15-16). Malory writes it on his last sentence of his last page of his last book, and he leaves his reader staring at the suddenly dark title "the Death of Arthur". Perhaps this is where critics of Malory's Christianity in favor of his chivalry can find solace. While Malory alludes to a Resurrection of King Arthur, he does not compose it. Though Christ's knights die with Him, they do not have the ability to rise precisely He did. Malory's use of feast days allows his characters to mirror the life of Christ in many ways, but they ultimately cannot be God. Although, one could argue that ending the tale with Good Friday leaves the reader in anticipation for an Easter Sunday, a coming again. Nevertheless, the sole

occurrence of this crucial day on the Church calendar signifies to the reader that the end of the Post-Grail Quest holds a level of importance that other feasts do not have.

The *Morte* presents a continuous conversion of the heart as the pages turn. Feast Days, as I have been discussing, are one of the ways Malory leads his characters toward this internal growth. In Pre-Grail Quest, feasts abounded; every moment in the plot equated in day and occasion to a Feast Day. Though they are fewer in the Post-Grail Quest than in other sections, that does not lessen the evidence of authentic devotion they provide. If Feast Days themselves are means to reach an end—or to reach the “goal” in the terms of the *Catechism* (paragraph 80) — then maybe there is simply not a need to excessively refer to the means, now that the goal of an eternal gaze is closer to being achieved. The Feast Days are an essential piece of Tradition, and remain that way throughout the entirety of the *Morte*; yet, these external celebrations are tempered when the focus turns to the internal effects of other pieces of Tradition, such as the Sacraments.

Tradition: Sacraments

Sacraments remain just as striking in the Post-Grail Quest books as in the other books; now, however, our primary cast of characters is more involved within them and affected by them than they were before. Four of the seven Catholic Sacraments emerge in this section: the Eucharist within the celebration of the Mass, Confession, the Anointing of the Sick within Last Rites, and Holy Orders. Consistent with the rest of the books, there is no explicit Confirmation. Though Malory employs the word “christened”, no Baptism takes place; the word is used to describe someone who is baptized and subsequently trustworthy. Though Sir Lancelot and Guenevere partake in the marital act

of consummation explicitly for the only time in the *Morte* (“Malory and Character” 146), there is no subsequent Sacrament of marriage to speak of. The direct focus of the Post-Grail Quest, then, is the Anointing of the Sick, Confession, Holy Orders, and the Mass.

In the chivalric world of often violent adventures, injuries and death are commonplace—but the books after the Grail Quest contain Last Rites in a startling number. This section entails deaths such as Sir Gawain, Sir Lancelot, King Arthur, Queen Guenevere, Sir Patryse, Sir Gaheris, Sir Gareth, Bors and his companions in the Holy Land, and more. Though Malory does not explicitly say that every one of these characters—in addition to the many others who die—receive Last Rites, Medieval Christian practices imply that they do. Last Rites technically encompasses three Sacraments: Anointing of the Sick, the Eucharist, and often Confession (CCC 1517-1519). Mass is the only Sacrament within Last Rites that Malory identifies. Anointing of the Sick would have been included within the rite, but Malory, perhaps because of the knowledge of his readers, does not need to mention it. The same goes for the Sacrament of Confession. Malory refers to “penance” and uses Confession-like language often in this section, but he leaves it mostly ambiguous as to whether he refers to the Sacrament itself or merely a desire for penance within the heart. Whichever way he means it, Cherewatuk argues, it is significant: “In analyzing the final scenes of the *Morte D’Arthur*, critics ignore Malory’s language of sin, confession, and salvation at the peril of treating a medieval text as a modern one. After all, for the medieval Christian, “Confession is the means through which sinners gain eternity” (“Lancelot and the Language of Sin” 71). The Sacraments within Last Rites find their significance through the repetition of death; it requires the gaze to constantly turn not only to the internal, but to the eternal. The

Anointing of the Sick is deemed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as the “sacramentum exeuntium (the sacrament of those departing)” because it “fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father's house” (paragraph 523). The Sacraments of death, not the Sacraments of new life (baptism, Confirmation) are present here, and they augment the *Morte*'s transformation by turning the readers of the *Morte* not toward this life, but toward the one to come.

Holy Orders, though again not described in these terms, are the means by which many of the characters finally shift their gaze from external quests to eternal life. In the Pre-Grail Quest, only one knight celebrated the Sacrament of Holy Orders (see page 31 of this thesis). Now, troops of knights take on the armor of a habit and the weapon of prayer through Holy Orders. After the end of the war, after the death of Arthur, Queen Guenevere retreats into Almsbury and becomes a nun. Nuns do not receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders; however, Guenevere's decision to enter into the convent not only leads her to be “vertuously chaunged” (Field 929.6), but also leads the men around her to a deeper holiness through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. “By following her example, he achieves a stability that he had been unable to achieve earlier” (Kennedy 43). The first of many, and the most heart-wrenching, is the ordination of Sir Lancelot himself. When Lancelot visits Guenevere at the convent, she bitterly denounces her sin with him, and expresses her newfound desire for eternal life, no matter the sacrifice.

Therefore, Sir Launcelot, wyte thou well I am sette in such a plight to gete my soule hele. And yet I truste, thorow Goddis grace and thorow Hys Passion of Hys woundis wyde, that aftir my deth I may have a syght of the blyssed face of Cryste, Jesu, and on Doomesday to sytte on Hys right syde; for as synfull as ever I was, now are seyntes in hevyn. (Field 932.32 – 933.2)

Following these harsh words, however, Guenevere calls upon the love between her and Lancelot: “I require the and beseche the hartily, for all the love that ever was betwyxt us, that thou never se me no more in tis visage” (933.3-5). She concludes her powerful speech by exhorting Lancelot to go into his kingdom of France, to defend it, and to take a wife. For once, Lancelot does not obey her—he refuses. In his loyalty to her, he follows after, and embraces the Sacrament of Holy Orders. And this loyalty, while undertaken for muddled reasons, ultimately leads to his eternal salvation. Or, as Edward Donald Kennedy puts it, “For Guenevere the ending of the *Morte Darthur* is not the tragic one that it is for the Arthurian kingdom as a whole. She achieves salvation for herself and enables Lancelot to achieve it” (44).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders, while it starts Lancelot’s radical eternal embrace, does not necessarily start out with such a goal. As Karen Cherewatuk explains it, Lancelot “takes his religious vows in imitation of the queen’s...when she questions his motivation, Lancelot responds with a magnificent profession of faith—not to God but to Gwen” (“Christian Rituals” 86). And indeed, he does: “I shall never be so false unto you of that I have promised. But the same desteny that ye have takyn you to, I woll take me to, for to please Jesu, and ever for you I caste me specially to pray” (Field 933.17-19). His desire for her kiss one last time (934.2) also muddies his motives of undertaking this Sacrament. Yet, even Lancelot sees a need for his own spiritual growth:

For in the queste of the Sankgreall I had that tyme forsaykyn the vanities of the worlde, had nat youre love bene. And if I had done so at that tyme with my harte, wylle, and thought, I had passed all the knyghtes that ever were in the Sankgreall except Sir Galahad, my sone. And therefore, lady, sythen ye have taken you to perfeccion, I must nedys take me to perfection, of right. (933.25-31)

Lancelot's holy end that falls at the end of the *Morte* reveals that the Sacrament of Holy Orders does, in fact, lead Lancelot to his deepest spirituality. Lancelot's example, too, inspires other knights around him in their pursuit of holiness: "For whan they sawe Syr Launcelot endure suche penaunce in prayers and fastynges they toke no force what payne they endured, for to see the noblese knyght of the world take such abstynance that he waxed ful lene" (935.17-20). They are so inspired that they, too, espouse the Sacrament of Holy Orders, leaving the *Morte* the opposite of how it began: with a large embrace of Holy Orders. When donning the habit, the knights also leave behind their old way of life as they harbor a new, deep Christian faith.

Mass, the only Sacrament explicitly named in the Post-Grail Quest tales, unveils the culmination of spiritual growth, specifically within Lancelot. As Professor David Clark explains, "Lancelot goes from not attending Mass regularly in the early part of *Morte* to the most frequent Mass attender during Quest of Holy Grail, then "he ends his life singing Mass" ("Hierachy" 144). Within the Post-Grail Quest, the celebration of Mass takes place over twenty times, and most are to commemorate a death. This marriage Sacrament of Christ and His Church redeems Lancelot's desire for the actual Sacrament of marriage of which he does not partake with Guenevere. The lips that kissed Guenevere now sing her Mass and utter prayers for her flight to Heaven.

The Sacraments of Holy Orders and Mass specifically allow for a deep turn from human desire to eternal love. Lancelot and Guenevere, through their embrace of this new vocation, turn away from one another in the worldly sense. And yet, they ultimately are able to embrace one another in the deepest way possible: through a richly spiritual and eternal-focused love.

Tradition: Clergy

It is fitting that I end with an analysis of the clergy in my study of the conversion of the heart through Catholicism, for it is in these Post-Grail Quest books that we find greatest evidence for deepest spiritual conversion. Though J. Cameron Moore is right in his statement that “ubiquitous hermits no longer appear around every corner” (17), by no means does the vocation lose its significance. In my past chapters, I examined how the clergy served first as physical healers and then as spiritual healers for the knights. The same holds true in the Post-Grail Quest. When Lancelot is injured, he is taken to a hermitage for physical care. Sir Bedivere desires to aid the soul of King Arthur into Heaven as he prays over his (supposed) body. The Post-Grail Quest is notable, however, because the clergy is no longer a separate entity with whom the knights interact—the primary characters have *become* the clergy, and must now step into these healer roles. While numerous other knights join the clergy, I am going to continue to focus on Lancelot, as he is arguably the greatest example of spiritual growth within the *Morte*. As Moore writes, the higher standard set in the Grail Quest does not disappear, but instead “internalizes itself” within Lancelot after the Grail Quest. I began the discussion of Lancelot’s priesthood at the end of the last chapter; now, I will focus on his new role as a clerical healer.

Lancelot shows signs of a priestly vocation even before he even dons the habit in the healing of Sir Urry episode. When men enter into the priesthood, they make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (CCC 944); while Lancelot may not have embraced the aspect of chastity at this point, he is already practicing the vow of obedience. When Lancelot comes upon the kingdom, it is only at Arthur’s demand that Lancelot attempts

to heal Sir Urry. “Then said Arthur unto Sir Launcelot: Ye must do as we have done...” Lancelot argues, but Arthur insists: “‘Ye shall nat chose, seyde Kynge Arthur, ‘for I commaund you for to do as we all have done.’ ‘My moste renowned lorde,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘Ye know well I dare nat nor may nat disobey you’” (866.31-34). Some could say that this is not an instance of religious obedience; rather, it is a knight’s duty to be obedient to his king. While this is true, it can also be argued that Lancelot was not always obedient to his king—take his secret pursuit of Queen Guenevere, for example. Obedience is a virtue that Lancelot practices successfully here. It is especially notable that Malory combines a physical healing, which he distinguished in the Pre-Grail Quest books as a gift of the clergy, with this virtue of obedience, in one moment of his own creation. As discussed above, Lancelot is the only knight of a hundred and ten that is able to heal Sir Urry’s physical wounds. This sets Lancelot apart from the hermits and priests that tended to his own bodily suffering in prior books. Lancelot, through his prayer, offers more than a place of refuge and rest—he is able to give Sir Urry complete physical healing.

Though Malory does not describe Lancelot as interpreting any dreams, he does, however, welcome his role as a spiritual healer and counselor through his participation in the Sacraments. Lancelot is not depicted as hearing Confessions or partaking in baptisms; his spiritual healing alights in his prayers for the dead and celebrating Mass—most notably, for King Arthur and Queen Guenevere. He can not directly give them counsel, as the hermits did for him, but he can give their souls solace and grace through his own prayer. As Clark puts it,

In the requiem mass, Lancelot expresses his love for the queen appropriately, *attending to her salvation*....In singing the mass, Lancelot participates in

communion with God as fully as a person can... In singing it for Guenevere, Lancelot serves her as fully as a man can. Lancelot's last act unites both his spiritual and worldly desires, allowing him to fully achieve both. After this final act, he dies a saintly death. ("Mass Attendance" 147, emphasis mine)

Lancelot, with his espousing of the priestly vocation, accepts responsibility for the souls of those around him; the Requiem Mass is his way to spiritually aid Queen Guenevere. One could also say that this Mass, while prayerfully aiding Guenevere's eternal quest, also provides spiritual healing for Lancelot himself, filling his love for Guenevere with rightly-ordered love for her and for God. As a member of the clergy, Lancelot ministers to others as spiritual healer and counselor, like the holy men before him. This vocation both allows for and reveals Lancelot reaching his deepest level of faith.

The clergy play an irreplaceable role throughout the entirety of the *Morte*. Priests, hermits, and bishops grow more and more into the fore as the tale goes on, culminating in Lancelot's adoption of the habit. The Catholic vocation of the priesthood is both the means through which deepest spiritual growth is attained and ultimately, the fruit of the spiritual growth thus far. This is why the Post-Grail Quest's faith is essential—the same man who once pursued external worship and slept with women now pursues eternity, and smiles in the sleep of death (Field 938.18).

External to Eternal

The Post-Grail Quest is the moment in which the characters finally reach the eternal. In the beginning of the *Morte*, as I explained, Malory outlined the Christian practices of the knights, but did not indicate any sign of its spiritual consequences. As the *Morte* now ends, we can turn back and witness the slow but steady shifts in the spiritual maturity of the characters. Though Scripture allusions remain the same throughout, they

grow bolder—to where other scholars have taken note of it. Feast Days lessen in appearance as the tale goes on; however, Malory uses them in the beginning to first draw his reader's attention to the Church calendar, and implements them later in still the same ways. The Sacraments go from being described in a mere five to seven words to being expounded upon and described in rich detail—and being celebrated by Christ Himself. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, especially indicates spiritual growth as we turned to the role of the clergy throughout the text. Holy men serve the knights physically first, and slowly, become a spiritual guide and advisor for them. The clergy's role as healer grows more beautiful, and at the pinnacle of the text, Sir Lancelot himself enters into the vocation. The intertwining of Scripture and Tradition reveal their brightest colors in the Post-Grail Quest, as Malory unveils the full tapestry of the *Morte*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The Greatest Quest

“For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church” (CCC 1).

Scholars have analyzed the *Morte*'s birth, its characters, its chivalry; but the scholarship surrounding its deeply Catholic roots remains undeveloped. While some scholars believe that Malory's chivalry replaces the Christianity within the *Morte*, the authenticity of the *Morte*'s faith is realized when the text is read in light of the Medieval Christianity Malory and his readers understood. The Catholic Christian faith of the *Morte* is colorfully woven through the twin pillars of Scripture and Tradition. The breath of God and its living transmission, “bound closely together...come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal” (CCC 80). The goal? Moving from the path that “betokeneth the way of synners and of mysbyleuers” to the path “betokeneth the hyghe way of our lord Ihesu Cryste” (686.16-18). Personal movement from being “scattered and divided by sin” to joining the “unity of His family, the Church” (CCC 1). The goal of the intertwining Scripture and Tradition is the same outcome of the *Morte*: an eternal relationship with God.

I explored how the authenticity of Malory's Christianity is rooted in these Catholic pillars of Scripture and Tradition. Malory's expansive use of Biblical allusions

reveal that—whether he intended it or not—Scripture is at the heart of the composition of the *Morte*. I examined Tradition in three ways: through the implementation of Feast Days, the role of Sacraments, and the vocation of the Clergy. All of these elements of Catholicism are authentic, but each one morphs and shifts simultaneously into a deeper faith as the tale draws to a close.

To put it simply—the *Morte D'Arthur* is Christian work because it is a Catholic work down to its core, from the beginning Christmas Mass to the prayer at its end. And we, too, can close its cover knowing that we ourselves can find the same spiritual transformation within us as within the pages of the *Morte*. The quest every Christian faces is external. And it is internal. And it has eternal consequences. May we, like Lancelot, recommit ourselves to living in God's mercy, over and over. May we, like Sir Galahad, choose the path that belongs to Christ when we reach the "crosse" in the road (Field 684.3-5). May we realize that the most meaningful quest on this side of Heaven and the one with which we will all end is not the Grail Quest, but "the quest begonne in" each of us (720.22).

Malory's Catholic spirituality offers much for those willing to pore over the pages of the *Morte*. Though we reach the end of the death of Arthur, "I praye you all, jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his knyghts from the begynnyng to the endynge, praye for me" (940.21-23). Please pray for me, and I will pray for you, that God may reveal to us all the climactic and perfect conclusion of the "quest begonne" in each of us.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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