THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Ideal of the *Imitatio Christi* in Chivalric Works in Late Medieval England: A Case Study

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PhD in English Literature
The University of Edinburgh
2018

Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed Chenlin Shou

Abstract

Christians have pursued the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* since the early days of the Christian church. There are two intertwined traditions within this ideal: the imitation of Christ's divinity and humanity, which correspond to qualities that are conventionally regarded as "active" and "passive" in general. It is the latter tradition which emphasizes humility and humbleness that modern people are more exposed to, and their familiarity has had the effect of rather distorting modern critical responses to the late medieval discourses of religious chivalry.

The attitudes towards violence are illustrative of the tensions between these two traditions that can be traced back to the Bible itself. These tensions were deeply felt by medieval authors when they wrote about chivalric virtues, particularly because using violence is at the very centre of a knightly life. My thesis surveys some of the representative voices on chivalry in late medieval England in order to get a rounded view of whether and how knights were expected to imitate Christ in that period. These texts include the model chivalric romance *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* in which he works with romance traditions when portraying ideal knights, St. Bernard's crusade propaganda that is illustrative of a special way in which religious and military ideals are fused, two chivalric manuals that offer both theoretical and practical advice to knights, emphasizing the use of force and the value of prowess, Pizan's treatise examining the role of knights in an ideal medieval body politic and one of the rare female voices on the topic of chivalry in the medieval period, and finally, Caxton's dedications to his chivalric publications, which show the knightly elements that were likely to be the most attractive to his contemporaries.

My examination shows a far more complex picture than I expected. It is not surprising to see that authors working within the romance tradition are

more likely to idealize and spiritualize chivalric behaviour than authors writing chivalric manuals. Their views on notions such as prowess, penance, honour, violence, and wealth, all integral parts of a knightly life, are often in stark contrast to each other. However, none of the texts I examine presents a “pure” form of chivalry or the *imitatio*, but both traditions are often intermingled: the pacifist knight Conscience sees Christ vanquishing forces of evil as a valiant warrior, and the highly pragmatic Charny does not forget to remind his fellow knights of their religious obligations. With the use of force often being a necessity in maintaining peace and order in real life, the authors struggle to reconcile this necessity with Christian doctrines of love and peace. Such efforts to integrate the contradictory, as we will see, frequently fail.

Instead of calling the authors of the chivalric works with mostly secular tones “negligent of their religious duties,” or those of works containing notions that entirely conflict with modern morals “deviating from true Christianity,” I argue that the ideal of the *imitatio* should not be seen as a fixed set of ideas. Rather, an author tends to choose the elements, all of which are supported by the Bible and its subsequent interpretations, that best suit his or her purposes. It is by practices such as avoiding judging the past by our own standards that our understanding of history progresses by combining knowledge of the past with that of the present. With the historicist belief that both literary and non-literary texts reflect the past, I hope this study might shed some light on the complex and sometimes paradoxical attitudes towards chivalry and religion in late medieval England.

Lay Summary

Christians have pursued the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ) since the early days of the Christian church. There are two intertwined traditions within this ideal: the imitation of Christ's divinity and humanity, which correspond to qualities that are conventionally regarded as "active" and "passive" in general. It is the latter tradition which emphasizes humility and humbleness that modern people are more exposed to, and their familiarity has had the effect of rather distorting modern critical responses to the late medieval discourses of religious chivalry.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratefulness to my principal supervisor Dr David Salter, who has guided me through every stage of my PhD studies with his profound knowledge on the subject and has given me all the help I need. Furthermore, I also wish to thank him for his everlasting patience and understanding for my long periods of procrastination and unproductiveness, as well as for his warm encouragement that supported me through depression and frustration.

My most sincere thanks also go to my assistant supervisor Prof Greg Walker, whose perceptive remarks and always prompt replies to my enquiries helped me solve the most difficult questions my thesis aims to answer. I would also like to thank Dr Sarah Carpenter for her valuable feedback on my work.

I also would like to acknowledge the generous support I have received from China Scholarship Council (CSC), which has provided full financial support for my PhD.

I also wanted to give a huge thank you wave to all my friends who have kindly helped me find materials and listened to my complaints when life is hard, in particular Xiaoyi Zhang, Bo Zhang, Huanming Pan, and Yuyan Feng. I hope you will finish you theses soon (for those who are doing a PhD)!

Finally, I want to thank my parents for their unwavering faith in me and for being indulgent with my negligence of filial duties. Without these I would never have finished my thesis.

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Chapter 1. The *Imitatio Christi* and Chivalry in the Late Middle Ages

This thesis primarily aims to examine the influence of the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* on notions of chivalry in late medieval England, and in some cases in other Western European cultures as well, particularly France. With Christ being at the centre of Christianity, two intertwined traditions emerged from Christians' endeavours to follow him since the earliest days of the Church: the imitation of Christ's divinity and that of his humanity, which correspond to qualities that are conventionally seen as "active" and "passive" in general. Not surprisingly, the view of Christ in all his splendour as a victorious conqueror of Death and Sin was attractive to earlier Germanic warrior cultures, but a major shift of focus from Christ's divinity to his humanity took place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and it is the latter tradition which emphasizes humility and humbleness that is more familiar to modern liberal-minded readers.

With the above paradigm in mind, I started my project a few years ago looking forward to interpreting the knights who adopted a predominantly pacifist view of chivalry in late medieval English chivalric works from a new angle. Yet later I found that while "an unheroic image of man" (Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry* 94), which is in particular illustrated by characters' disinterest in feats of arms, is not only a characteristic of Ricardian poetry but can also be observed in some chivalric works beyond that period, it is far from being the norm in this genre even long after the shift in modes of imitating Christ took place.

It turns out that the authors entertain greatly varied ideas about elements in chivalry such as prowess, penance, honour, wealth, and violence, but violence seems to be the issue on which opinions are most divided. The attitudes towards violence are illustrative of the tensions between two traditions of the *imitatio* that can be traced back to the Bible itself. These

tensions were deeply felt by medieval authors particularly because using violence is what being a knight essentially entails. Perhaps coincidentally but quite understandably, it is in Malory, who works with the romance tradition, and in Langland, who uses a large number of romance motifs in his poem, that the modern reader may find a familiar version of the *imitatio* stressing gentleness and peace. The other authors I discuss, when they are faced with stark realities, either do not explicitly mention imitating Christ, or when they do, it is often done by slaughtering enemies of the Christian faith, evoking Christ's image as a conqueror and the wrathful God in the Old Testament. However, in the texts I examine both traditions of the *imitatio* are often intermingled: the pacifist knight Conscience sees Christ vanquishing forces of evil as a valiant warrior, and the highly pragmatic Charny does not forget to remind his fellow knights of their religious obligations. With the use of force and fear often being a necessity in maintaining peace and order in practice, the authors struggle to reconcile this necessity with Christian doctrines of love and peace, and even St. Bernard has to admit that killing must be the final option, to which the knights of Christ should only resort after all other methods have been exhausted. A similar situation is seen in the authors' attitudes towards wealth. Some of them, like St. Bernard and Langland, cling to the evangelical notion of voluntary poverty, while the knightly authors view wealth far less harshly. Malory and Charny, for example, see wealth as a crucial part of chivalric life, with the latter also cautioning his fellow knights against over-expenditure and excessively luxurious clothing. However, even Langland, with all his sometimes radical and harsh criticism of the corruptive powers of wealth, at several points has to admit that money is a necessity in reality.

As is often the case, the authors make great efforts to synthesize conflicting ideas about chivalry and the ideal of the *imitatio*, but such efforts, unfortunately, frequently fail. Such failures are also a central issue this thesis

aims to explore. In addition, instead of calling the authors of the chivalric works with mostly secular tones “negligent of their religious duties,” or those of works containing notions that entirely conflict with modern morals “deviating from true Christianity,” I argue that the ideal of the *imitatio* should not be seen as a fixed set of ideas. Rather, an author tends to choose the elements, all of which are supported by the Bible and its subsequent interpretations, that best suit his or her purposes. One example is that because a great portion of *Piers Plowman* is intended as a piece of social criticism, debates over the relationship between wealth and chivalry are far more prominent in this poem than in Malory. It is by practices such as avoiding judging the past by our own standards that our understanding of history progresses by combining knowledge of the past with that of the present. With the historicist belief that both literary and non-literary texts reflect the past, I hope this study might shed some light on the complex and sometimes paradoxical attitudes towards chivalry and religion in late medieval England.

There are five chapters in this thesis. In the first chapter I present the thesis outline followed by a survey of the intellectual background. In the next three chapters I attempt to cover as comprehensively as possible a variety of discourses on chivalry in late medieval England for the evaluation of the emphasis placed on imitating Christ as a requirement for knights by different authors. Some of these texts were composed by English authors, and others were written by foreign writers but nonetheless available to the English literate classes and reflective of the mainstream attitudes towards chivalry among those for whom such texts were produced and among whom they were circulated.

I start with the latter half of Malory’s great synthesis of Arthurian legends in which the ideal of imitating Christ, along with its difficulties, come to the fore. In the next chapter, I discuss Langland’s portrayal of Christ as an ideal knight

and the author's somewhat ambivalent acknowledgement of the role of knightly enforcement of law and order as a *sine qua non* in society. Both authors seem to hold the view that knights should imitate Christ in a relatively pacifist way, throwing into sharp relief St. Bernard's praise of justified violence in order to imitate Christ, which I go on to consider in the following chapter. My discussion of the *imitatio* at the kernel of the crusading ethos is then complemented by that of two treatises on chivalry written by Ramon Llull, a former knight, and Geoffroi de Charny, a practising one. Like St. Bernard's instructions for the Knights Templar, Llull's work highlights knights' religious obligations, but Charny's treatise is much more pragmatic and reflects the practical realities of life as a knight.

Having surveyed all these male authors, I turn to a medieval woman finding her own voice in a field that is often regarded as exclusively dominated by men – Christine de Pizan's treatise on the roles of knights and kings (ideally also valiant knights) in society offers a rare opportunity to look at the issue from a woman's point of view. Although the last group of texts which I go on to discuss, Caxton's prologues and epilogues to his chivalric publications, may seem formulaic, they highlight the elements in chivalry that understandably would be most appealing to his readers and therefore central in their understanding of chivalry. In the final chapter of this thesis, I set out to explain the discrepancies between dominant modern notions of imitating Christ and that seen in the medieval works previously examined, and how such differences, when properly contextualized and interpreted, may contribute to our understanding of history and human nature in general.

In the rest of this introductory chapter I will look at the history of the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* and its applications, particularly for knights, in the Late Middle Ages.

1.1 The Ideal of the *Imitatio Christi*

The ideal of the *imitatio Christi* means far more than doing good things following Jesus Christ's example. Rather, as the supreme ideal of Christian life, it is closely linked to fundamental Christian doctrines addressing issues such as the mechanisms of salvation, the nature of Christ, and the role of penance during the journey in this world to the afterlife. Medieval people from all social backgrounds were often urged to imitate Christ, and knights were not exceptions to this exhortation.[1] My thesis aims to explore how knights were expected to imitate Christ in late medieval England by surveying some of the representative literary and non-literary works on chivalric ideals. Such an approach is necessary in the study of ideas. "The boundaries of texts are permeable. Each text exists with a vast 'society of texts' in various genres and media: no text is an island entire to itself" (Chandler 203), so that comparisons between different treatments of similar themes across genres need to be conducted when studying intellectual history. Chivalry did not exist in a vacuum and should not be studied in that manner, either. Instead of focusing on special English traits in the nation's attitudes towards chivalry, I believe that the cases studied here are illustrative of characteristics observable in late medieval Western European Christian societies in general. When knights are referred to as imitating Christ, I often use the two slightly different and often overlapping senses of the phrase interchangeably. First, the valiant warriors are often portrayed with the same language that medieval authors would use when depicting saints and even Christ himself. Second, the knights consciously model their behaviour on that of Christ.

Before further enquires can be made, we must know what the *imitatio*

[1] The Latin word *imitator* in the Bible is usually translated into "follower" (Constable 145). Therefore, even when medieval authors do not explicitly state that knights should imitate Christ, they usually have this idea in mind.

Christi is. The question can only be answered by looking at the entire history of the ideal. As Marc Bloch asserts, “we can never interpret a document except by inserting it into a chronological series or a synchronous whole . . . At the bottom of nearly all criticism there is a problem of comparison” (92). Similarly, regarding the proper study of intellectual history, Quentin Skinner concurs that “the performativity of texts and the need to treat them intertextually” must be emphasized, which means that texts must be located in their specific contexts so that we would know what the authors were doing (vii).

The aim of the following sections in this chapter, therefore, is to first briefly sketch the outline of this ideal: its origin, development, and status in the Late Middle Ages, which is followed by a short examination of the fluctuating relationship between chivalry and religion in the medieval period. The notions and terms discussed here, such as the worship of saints, theories of the atonement, Christ’s Passion, and penance, provide the background against which the literary and non-literary texts are viewed.

1.2 Its Origin and Subsequent Development up to the Late Middle Ages

It is evident that Christ, from whom the religion gains its name, plays a central role in Christianity, as Cousins claims, "By its very nature Christian spirituality focuses on Christ" (375).[2] The ideal of imitating Jesus Christ in life has its very textual foundation in the New Testament. As Giles Constable points out, for people in the Middle Ages, the key biblical texts bringing forth the notion of imitating Christ are seven passages in the Pauline epistles, in which Paul uses a word translated in the *Vulgate* as *imitator* in reference to himself, the Church, Christ, or God (145). By the phrase *imitatio Christi*, people in late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages meant something vastly different from the late medieval concept of the term, which would usually invoke the image of a human Jesus in agony on the cross. Jesus's humanity was never entirely neglected and there was "no reluctance to portray the human figure [of Christ] in Christian art" in the Roman frescoes dating from the second and third centuries (Pocknee 38), but in general Christ in the eyes of the early Church,[3] which focused on his resurrection and glorification, was more divine than human, and to imitate Him signified a process of deification, of which two representative forms were martyrdom and, in a less extreme way, renouncing the world's vanities by leading a cloistered life (Constable 148-49). While Christianity rejected the pagan belief of a person's deification during his/her lifetime, it was still generally believed that after death one could regain divinity (which was lost in humanity's fall from grace) and become one with God. Even for some Alexandrine theologians who were much interested in Christ's life as a human being, their primary interest nonetheless lay in his divinity (Constable

[2] See Pelikan for an excellent survey of the cultural significance of Christ throughout history. For a brief study of some of the representative types of imitating Christ, see Giles.
[3] One should be careful that phrases such as "the Church's attitude" are crude generalizations, because "'the church' scarcely represented a monolithic body of thought" (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 11). For the sake of brevity, however, such phrases are still used in this thesis.

152-53). The Latin fathers seem to have placed more emphasis on Christ's humanity, but even in their works ambiguities abound. Ambrose and Augustine, for example, regarded the *imitatio* as a means through which human beings are elevated in salvation (Constable 155-56).

Because the emphasis of Christ's nature was mainly placed on his divinity, the predominant image of Jesus in the early Church was "all-powerful, the king of heaven, and interchangeable with God," a view also illustrated by the art and liturgy in that period, with Christ depicted as a triumphant king who conquers the devil for mankind's salvation, and Easter gaining much more significance than either Christmas or Epiphany (Constable 157-58). Even the depiction of the Crucifixion was sometimes controversial until the sixth ecumenical Council held in 681 declared that Christ shall be shown in his human form, condemning the Monothelite heresy (Pocknee 40–41). With the advent of Germanic invaders, this image of Christ neatly fit their military culture and therefore continued to flourish.[4] Germanic peoples saw Christ as a powerful king as well as a valiant warrior, who is surrounded by loyal followers, and even their kings were anointed as imitators of Christ (Constable 158-61). As Constable notes, in about 1000 C.E., Christ was still regarded as "earnest, stern, often threatening, in short the *rex tremendae maiestatis*" (163). The title *dominus*, which once was only reserved for members of the highest social ranks who were "in possession of a power considered to be a delegation of the might of Christ," was widely applied to all knights by the end of the twelfth century (Duby 294). Such an image of Christ will continue to be the more popular version until the great shift in the twelfth century.

[4] For the mutual influence of biblical and heroic traditions among the Germanic peoples, see Keen 51-55.

1.3 The *Imitatio Christi* in the Late Middle Ages

Scholars have varied opinions about the trend in imitating Christ in the Late Middle Ages. While the image of the militant and victorious Christ never completely lost its favour and actually continues to exist to this day, a major shift did occur in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which placed more emphasis on Christ's humanity than on his divinity.[5] Cousins suggests that the new focus on Christ "culminated in an almost exclusive emphasis on Christ's passion to the point of overshadowing his resurrection" (375). The two types of imitation "drew on different religious and philosophical traditions, and the contrast between them can be seen in terms of doing and being, present and future, or (more prejudicially) matter and spirit" (Constable 169).

The key virtues in imitating Christ's humanity are "His obedience, humility, compassion, and other human qualities" (Constable 170). People in the Late Middle Ages even tended to (mis)interpret their predecessors' concern over Christ's love and Passion (in earlier times understood as keys to human beings' salvation and possible deification) as a desire to imitate Christ's earthly life for its own sake. For example, Thomas Aquinas, Hucbald, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter the Venerable all cited Augustine in support of their view that to "follow" Christ is to imitate his words and deeds (Constable 173-4). The double biography of St. Francis, *De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu*, in which the life of the saint is paralleled with Christ's, is another good example of the centrality of the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* to late medieval canons of holiness and sanctity (Pelikan 135–36). In addition, the *lectio divina*, a monastic reading primarily of the scriptures, was increasingly concentrated on the life of Christ, which, by the readers' imagining themselves

[5] Along with this shift of focus was an increasing degree of realism in the depictions of the Crucifixion, a process taking place gradually through many centuries in medieval Europe. See Pocknee 47-66 for details. For relevant changes in visual arts in general, see Mâle's classic study in late medieval French religious art.

being present at the crucial events, “led to an identification with Christ and a desire to imitate his virtues” (Cousins 377). It is also not surprising that Christ was believed to have lived as an exemplar of various professions, including the *milites*, who were encouraged to imitate their king as a delegate of Christ (Constable 326-7).

It needs to be noted that the most notable imitators of Christ’s earthly life, monks and nuns, had other exemplars as well, including the angels’ hymns, apostles, Fathers of the Church, and others. Constable comments that “The soteriological role of Christ’s divinity was . . . unique, but the example of His humanity was only one among many in the early Middle Ages” (175). However, Christ, in whom one finds all the ways to God, is much more than just another saint to follow; he is the ultimate source of all these *exempla*. The devotional writings and saints’ lives, for example, provided teachings on virtues that can be found in Christ, while the saints themselves were also “inspired by a desire to follow the Gospel and imitate the life of Christ and by a devotion to His humanity,” and even the saints’ performance of miracles were called “the humble and constant imitator of the most humble master Jesus Christ” (Constable 182). Therefore, it seems that similar to the hierarchical structure in paradise, there are different levels in the system of imitating Christ, with Christ at the pinnacle and the human participants such as the saints forming rings of the chain as mediators between God and humans. Because human efforts of imitation are always prone to error and imperfection, imitating a saint is often hardly distinguishable from imitating Christ.

Together with the change in the mainstream understanding of imitating Christ, a fundamental shift is also witnessed in theories of the atonement.[6]

[6] For a brief introduction to these theories, see Murray and Rea. Note that the authors also propose a third major theory of the atonement: the moral exemplar theory, according to which Christ transforms sinners with his exemplary character. All these theories,

Throughout the medieval period there were mainly two theories of the atonement. According to the first theory, which originated in the early days of Christianity and focused on the divinity of Christ, he is the victorious conqueror tricking the Devil who had a claim on human souls.[7] The second theory, which was proposed by Anselm of Canterbury and became more popular in the Late Middle Ages as Christ's humanity was increasingly highlighted in affective piety, claims that Christ sacrificed himself as a human being through his Crucifixion, which redeemed the human race in an act of love. The concept of the atonement is particularly important in the examination of knights' imitation of Christ, because one of their major social functions is to save the oppressed from their oppressors. As will be shown in this thesis, even in the most idealized accounts of knights' imitating Christ, the approach to overcoming forces of evil relevant to the second theory of the atonement, that is, acting with passivity and patience in order to transform the wicked and save the innocent, either fails to work at all or is so fraught with problems that it is of very limited success.

however, are not exclusive to each other but overlap in many aspects.

[7] For the Devil's rights/ransom theory, especially its representation in medieval English literature, including *Piers Plowman*, see Marx.

1.4 Knights Imitating Christ[8]

In general, scholars agree that medieval knights started as a body of sometimes unruly professional warriors and were gradually domesticated by the combined efforts of the reforming Church and emerging state.[9] While clerical influence on the chivalric ideology was definitely significant, knights still maintained their independence and expressed their own voices about a code of conduct in which religious and warrior ideals were fused. As Keen observes, the late medieval answer to the chaos caused by martial men "lay not in an abandonment of chivalrous values, but in a re-appeal to the traditional value of loyal and faithful service," which is corroborated by the increasing use of classic examples in chivalric treatises, "in which the emphasis on service as a public obligation was clearer than in the stories of the Arthurian past, with their individualist bent" (234-35). Although by logical deduction the shift in the emphasis on Christ's nature from a victorious conqueror to a passive sufferer might hint at a similar change in social ethos from aggression to pacifism within Christendom, historical evidence shows that the pattern was far more complex than that. According to Keen's highly generalized outline of the changes that took place within the Church's attitude towards violence and war from its early days to the end of the medieval period, the Church was mainly pacifist until it became the official religion of the Roman Empire and theories of just war

[8] The sheer volume of scholarship on the relationship between chivalry and religion makes it impossible to survey even a small number of studies within the scope of this introductory chapter. As a consequence, I will only point to some of the most important studies on this topic that have influenced my understanding of medieval knighthood. See Duby for the place of knights in the three orders of society. For general studies in chivalry, see Keen's classic *Chivalry*, as well as Barber's *The Knight and Chivalry*. Of particular relevance to this thesis is Kaeuper's examination of the relationship between knights and violence, a theme shared by several of his works, including *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* and *Holy Warriors*. The relationship between Christian ethics and war will be further discussed in the section on crusade propaganda in Chapter IV.

[9] See Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* 19–21. See also R. W. Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* 3–46.

began to develop. Later, when monasticism flourished, so did the pacifist tradition, a trend gradually overturned by the Carolingian and Ottonian warfare against the heathen as well as the Church's efforts at maintaining peace and order within Christendom and canalizing martial energy in external wars that it could direct, culminating in the crusading movement (44-63). Kaeuper presents a somewhat different picture from Keen's,[10] arguing that most clerics saw war and violence as necessities, and some of them even turned out to be bellicose and frankly pragmatic. However, due to the numerous "dissenting textual injunctions from biblical, liturgical, and patristic sources documenting the religion of the Prince of Peace" (12), Christian doubt about and renunciation of war coexisted with its overall affirmation, a situation which continued even after the beginning of the crusading movement. Knights, Kaeuper suggests, were pious on their own terms, and they often "simply assumed the merit of their actions and clothed them with religious terminology, even if it may seem to us ill-fitting," but some of them were also constantly fearing for their souls in the afterlife and taking actions to ease such fears (*Holy Warriors* 20–25). The majority of the knights, however, "might have been only vaguely aware of [tensions between chivalry and religion] which, like old wounds, were so familiar and habitually suppressed that they seldom came to the level of consciousness, causing pain only when probed" (*Holy Warriors* 32).

With chivalry's inherent tensions between religious and secular ideals thus briefly sketched, it is time to consider the ways in which knights were usually expected to imitate Christ with all these tensions in the background. From the desire to imitate Christ's humanity and divinity grew out a tendency to suffer with him, spiritually and physically. In both the *Sankgreal* and *Piers*

[10] See Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 9–12.

Plowman, Christ's Passion occupies central positions. The Holy Grail that the Arthurian knights set out to seek was used as a vessel for Christ's blood, and later the blood-stained Christ reveals himself to the Grail knights, ushering them into the final stage of the quest. At the climax of *Piers Plowman* the narrator witnesses both the Crucifixion and the subsequent Harrowing of Hell. Giles Constable argues that Christ's Passion is not only linked to his divinity as an essential preparatory stage for his resurrection, but it also highlights his humanity (194). Ross holds a similar view that it is particularly in the figure of the suffering Christ that the two images of God are united (5).[11] As a consequence, imitating Christ's Passion is a central component in all the methods of imitation.[12]

Imitating Christ's Passion was often understood and practiced in its literal sense by enduring hardships.[13] The satisfaction theory of the atonement means that God is pleased by suffering. Thus suffering, which prepares one for "a state of eternal surrender in celestial contemplation of God" (Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls* 51), is meritorious,[14] because it is "the specific means God has chosen both for Christ's redemptive work and for the sanctification of those who imitate Christ" (Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls* 89). From the early Church onwards, Christians were encouraged to imitate Christ's suffering and death in order to become closer to him and receive their rewards in the afterlife. Two core elements in Christ's suffering are his blood and wounds (Constable 209).

[11] For the significance of the sign of the cross, see Pelikan 95-108.
[12] Besserman suggests that there are three paradigms of depicting Christ's Passion in the Late Middle Ages. The first emphasizes his physical suffering; the second focuses on his and Mary's psychological suffering; the third highlights neither of the two.
[13] However, Teresa Morgan argues that Paul never suggests that suffering is intrinsically good, but he understands suffering as "embracing the consequences of a commitment one has made, in the conviction that however apparently negative, they are ultimately positive" (364).
[14] For knights' meritorious suffering and asceticism, along with some very gruesome examples, see Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 57–65.

In the late Middle Ages there were vivid, sometimes even graphic, presentations of these motifs which "are magnified in order to evoke the believer's compassionate response to the agonies" (Ross 6), urging their audiences to contemplate both Christ's pain and his love that are expressed in the Crucifixion. In fact, so great was medieval people's power of reconciling contradictory ideas that an ideal monastic life was compared to a figurative Crucifixion (Constable 212). Voluntary suffering was definitely practiced in real life, with flagellants roaming medieval streets during the Black Death, and certain Christians (some of them were heretics) inflicting wounds upon themselves as symbols of Christ's five wounds (Constable 215-6).[15] Yet hurting oneself was an extreme way to imitate Christ's Passion, and there were other milder forms. The ideal of the *imitatio* might reach less educated laity, including some of the knights, from sermons and other forms of devotional literature. Ross delineates how the image of Christ being tortured was applied by preachers and writers of spiritual guidance to intensify the audiences' and readers' emotional response: "Depictions of the suffering Saviour seek to stir humans to respond with love to the Divine's love for them by portraying sorrow as the appropriate response to humanity's affront to the Divine, by awakening compassion in the face of Christ's suffering, and by urging merciful action toward other Christians in imitation of Christ" (18). Medieval sermons also encouraged confession when people heed the call to imitate Christ (Ross 22). While services of confession and preaching were readily available to knights, they, however, also had ample opportunities to actually shed blood and receive wounds more than any other social group. Hardships, some of which are life-threatening, being an integral part of a

[15] Stigmata, which St. Francis, "the second Christ," was the first person to receive, have a special status among all kinds of wounds (Pelikan 136–37).

chivalric career,[16] to endure them is an act of imitating Christ. One of the most remarkable ways of imitating Christ that can be observed in the texts to be examined in this thesis is that the knights patiently endure bodily discomfort and even excruciating pain, which in certain cases are self-inflicted as means of penance or preventive measures against sin. In addition, when the knights show mercy to the defeated, help the weak, or confess their sins, they can all be regarded as imitating Christ.

Imitating Christ's Passion also has spiritual significances, which are manifest in a cluster of related ideas such as patience, penance (with its three components on the penitent's part: contrition, confession, and satisfaction), and asceticism.[17] A symbol of Christ's ultimate submission to the will of God the Father, the Passion is therefore viewed as the archetype of all acts of patience. It is worth noting that patience does not mean utter passiveness and inaction. Medieval authors use the term patience differently. Some use it only to refer to outward submission, and for others it means both submission and active adaptation to God's will. However, even in the former case the sense of adaptation is often suggested (Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls* 51). Closely associated with the virtue of patience is the value placed on penance. The concept of contrition is at the centre of penance, and to gain a full knowledge of one's sins, it is necessary to think of Christ's sufferings and the fact that human beings do not merit the grace which derives from them (Hopkins 52). It is perhaps surprising to modern people that penitence was not reserved only for those who have done bad things. Kieckhefer notes that "the great saints of all ages have accused themselves of being the greatest of sinners" (*Unquiet*

[16] As will be seen in Chapter IV, authors of chivalric manuals often boast of the dangers knights face and their ability to endure them. However, the physical risks in engaging in knightly warfare in the Late Middle Ages may not have been as great as we are led to think by medieval authors. See Keen 220-21.

[17] For the relationship between knights and the penitential system of the church, including penance and confession, see Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 167–93.

Souls 123), whose actions were innocent even according to contemporary standards. However, such soul-searching acts of penitence in fact disclose a greater degree of human weakness and thus reliance on God than patience does, because it stresses the fact that no mortal human being is truly innocent. Confession, as has been shown previously, was often encouraged as a means of imitating Christ. The last step of doing penance on the penitent's part, satisfaction, is both a self-cleansing act and one in which the penitent repairs his/her relationship with Christ. The relationship between asceticism and imitating Christ is not difficult to see. Asceticism, which often accompanies bodily and mental discomfort, is the denial of human desires in an attempt to subjugate the flesh that is liable to corruption. As a consequence, it can be viewed as voluntary suffering with varying degrees. Practices of asceticism include fasting, protecting one's chastity, voluntary sleep-deprivation, cultivating humility, voluntary poverty, wearing plain clothing, staying away from human company, remaining silent, and finally, physical mortification (Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls* 140). In the texts this thesis examines, such methods are frequently adopted by knights who try to imitate Christ.

The methods of imitating Christ were not always severe, particularly in late medieval England. Eamon Duffy argues that after the twelfth century "a more positive value was placed on the religious dignity of ordinary people and ordinary lifestyles," and even the anchorites and hermits in late medieval England "retained a more resolutely lay and independent character than elsewhere," with the author of *Ancrene Wisse* disapproving of cruel ascetical exercises and warning against excessive physical forms of penance ("Religious Belief" 297-98). While some historians suggest that the concept of renunciation was outmoded so that the closing of monasteries met little opposition, Janet Burton argues that in the Late Middle Ages the ideal of renunciation in fact began to take different forms, and it was then possible to

combine the active way of life with various forms of renunciation (368). Similarly, Hilary M. Carey suggests that it was towards the end of the fourteenth century that medieval people were "For the first time . . . urged to pursue the 'mixed life' which combined activity in the world with a personal, meditative prayer life" (361). Carey further points out that it was believed that a knight or his lady would not be required to achieve spiritual perfection, and only rarely do we see doubts that a knight's secular activities are sinful in themselves (363-68). Although the changes in the attitude towards the *vita activa*/*vita contemplativa* dichotomy might not be following such a clear-cut pattern as Duffy or Burton have presented,[18] and we might never know what position a certain medieval knight would take to this issue, it can still be quite safely assumed that the majority of late medieval English knights were comfortable with an ordinary life.

It is clear that the imitation of Christ centred on his Passion draws on an overall pacifist tradition that underscores his obedience to the divine will in the grand scheme of human salvation, which in turn calls for mankind's reliance on God and self-denial. As a consequence, the qualities labelled as Christ-like are often "passive." However, as Ellen M. Ross notes, the image of God, full of awe-provoking qualities, and that of a human, compassionate, and merciful God "at first appear to be incongruent . . . [but] are, in fact, inseparably related to one another in medieval religious life" (5). The story of Christ's Passion, which contains themes of both vengeance and forgiveness, can also be interpreted in two opposite directions, demonstrating the tension between the warrior code and religion. The Crucifixion is read as both "an end to cycles of

[18] As Giles Constable eloquently argues, "Every generation, almost since the beginning of Christianity, has tried to fit the story of Mary and Martha to its needs . . . Over the years its significance for the lives both of withdrawal and worldly activity and for this life and the next have changed . . . The very variety and ambiguity of these interpretations is evidence for the richness of the text and the ingenuity of the interpreters" (141).

violence" in Christ's appeasing the Father's anger, and "a powerful stimulus for more vengeful violence," because Christ's death was absolutely wrong and it was therefore suitable that he be revenged on God's enemies (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 22). It is from such sentiments that theories of just violence and finally, the crusading movement, were born.

With the major elements in knights' imitation of Christ having been surveyed, it is time to move on to an examination of probably the most Christ-like knight in medieval chivalric romance, Galahad, as well as the other knights who also set out on the quest for the presence of Christ. It is no surprise that it is in the genre of Arthurian romance that the chivalric experience of the *imitatio Christi* finds such clear expression. For the difficulties of reconciling the imperatives of fidelity to Christ with a life based on violence, even if it is violence in pursuit of morally justifiable ends, prove not to be so intractable in the fantasy world of romance as they are in life. But while Galahad's Christ-like nature would seem to represent the perfect synthesis of knightly duty and religious obligation, the fortunes and misfortunes encountered on the quest by members of the Round Table also highlight an awareness of the obstacles which inevitably confront knights, in reality as well as in fiction, when they seek to follow Christ's example.

Chapter 2. Saintly and Sinful Knights: The *Imitatio Christi* in *Le Morte d'Arthur*[1]

Thomas Malory's great synthesis of Arthurian legends has shaped or even dominated the modern reader's imagination of medieval knights. In Malory's time, the ideals of chivalry had already become highly ceremonialized, but his "greatest achievement is to give us a last glimpse of the high purpose that chivalry could inspire" (R. W. Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* 355). As the greatest synthesis and retelling of the Arthurian corpus in late medieval England,[2] *Le Morte d'Arthur* is the first text to be examined in this thesis in order to elucidate what imitating Christ might mean for knights in a literary context, not only from Malory's perspective, but also from that of his predecessors. As Benson observes, "Those who succeed in the Grail quest are indeed those who pattern themselves on Christ and turn aside from the ways of this world" (215). In the *Sankgreal* there are two types of relationship between the Grail knights and Christ, although this is only a very rough division and there are numerous cases where boundaries between the two are rather blurred, in particular the knights' endurance of physical and spiritual hardships in imitation of Christ's Passion. In the first category are knights' similarities to Christ in terms of physical and spiritual excellence, which are most obvious in Galahad. When reading stories of Galahad's achievements, the reader often sees a clear parallel between him and Christ (Galahad is said to fight against symbols of sins in his early act of exorcism in a tomb, and his later victory over

[1] To avoid confusion, in this chapter the entirety of Malory's work(s) will be referred to as *Le Morte d'Arthur* (*Le Morte*), and the last tale of *Le Morte* (according to Professor Vinaver's edition) will be referred to as the *Morte d'Arthur* (the *Morte*). All quotations from Malory are from *Malory: Complete Works* edited by Vinaver, and the quotations are referenced by page numbers followed by line numbers when appropriate.

[2] Caxton's publication of *Le Morte* doubtlessly boosted its popularity and influence significantly in England. For a more detailed discussion of its publication, see the section on Caxton in Chapter IV.

seven wicked knights to save the maidens is clearly an allusion to Christ the lover-knight). He is also the man destined to heal the Maimed King and put an end to the misery caused by the Dolorous Stroke, which happened because of the king's pride, the first and greatest sin. Galahad is also the only person ascending to heaven with the Grail. In addition, Galahad and his father Lancelot are Christ's blood relations. Unlike the inimitable and untested Galahad, the other two Grail knights, Perceval and Bors, must pass challenging and even excruciating trials before they are proven worthy to become Galahad's companions at the final stage of the quest. Besides heart-felt remorse for their transgressions, their personal reformation often involves harsh bodily penance that can be seen as means of imitating Christ's Passion or the martyrdom of saints. There are also two categories among the unsuccessful Grail seekers: Lancelot and the others. In the *Sankgreal* Lancelot performs deeds of penance as attempts to imitate Christ as much as Perceval and Bors do, but his greatest deficiency is unstableness, which the reader does not see until after the completion of the Grail quest. The other sinful knights, represented by Gawain, who refuse to repent, are marginalized in the *Sankgreal*. It is only at the very end of *Le Morte* that the survivors of the devastating battle between Arthur and Mordred finally renounce the world.

Among all of the qualities that Malory and his sources consider as key to a successful imitation of Christ, peace-loving is the most illustrative of the conflicts between conventional chivalric ideals of martial prowess and the *imitatio* as it is usually presented in the *Sankgreal*. Even Galahad, the knight most prone to avoiding conflict, often sees no problem in getting blood on his hands, and even when he injures his fellow knights the narrator simply takes it as a natural part of chivalric life. Ironically, sometimes when knights (especially Galahad and Bors) do avoid violence, their decisions lead to the loss of innocent lives which seems a greater injustice than using violence. In this

chapter I will pay special attention to such seemingly irreconcilable elements in Malorian knights' efforts to imitate Christ. The survey of such tensions is the first step towards a fuller examination of the relationship between violence and the *imitatio*, which is one of the major questions this thesis aims to address.

2.1 Malory the Author and the Late Medieval Worship of Saints

A thorough understanding of *Le Morte* could hardly be achieved if the work is not viewed against the backdrop of its composition. As a consequence, this chapter begins with a brief survey of Malory's personal background, which, among other things, will enable us to better grasp some of the assumptions Malory's first readership/audience, especially the laity, would make about an idealized version of chivalry and relationship of chivalric ideals to the more universal ones of imitating Christ.

A writer's life experience more often than not exerts great influence upon his/her *oeuvre*, and sometimes this influence can even be a dominating factor for the messages the works attempt to convey. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of materials, little is known about our imprisoned romancer, with his identity being one of the greatest enigmas in Malorian scholarship. The contemporary social-political conditions[3] seem not to have much impact on the author's presentation of the ideals on a micro level. Scholars such as George Lyman Kittredge, Edward Hicks, William Matthews, and R. R. Griffith have offered various suggestions as to which Malory is the author of *Le Morte*.[4] In one of the recent studies of the authorship of *Le Morte*, P. J. C. Field's *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, after a meticulous scrutiny of various documents, the author makes a convincing argument that, among nine

[3] See R. Barber; Griffith, "The Political Bias of Malory's 'Morte D'arthur.'"

[4] Such debates date from early years of modern Malorian scholarship. The author refers to himself as a knight at various points in his work (e.g. 726.20). It was Kittredge who first identified Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel as the author in the late nineteenth century, an argument which he later restated (4) and Hicks attested. William Matthews argues for a Yorkshire Malory (115–54). Griffith proposes Thomas Malory of Papworth St Agnes as the author by investigating "such matters as age, dialect, geography, conformity to well-founded early description, and political attitudes" ("The Authorship Question Reconsidered" 177). In fact, after reviewing all of the possible candidates that Field meticulously examines in his definitive work, we could see that all of them in fact were of similar social backgrounds, and as far as the ideal of imitating Christ for knights is concerned, individual factors are hardly traceable in relevant passages.

candidates for the authorship of *Le Morte*, “No-one but Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel could have written the *Morte Darthur*” (*The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* 35). Yet at the end of his study, Field admits that although the greatness of *Le Morte* allows the reader to gain more insight into Malory’s mind than we could for any other of his contemporaries, “that ‘more’ is still far less than we might wish” (171), and “any attempted full assessment of Malory’s personality from his writings . . . might still be doomed to failure” (172). Instead of such an attempt, Field proposes that there are certain features of his writing that may suggest what kind of person Malory may have been. First, his writing does not show an awareness of popular intellectual issues, and his style for most of the time is straightforward.[5] Second, he feels strongly about the eminence of the chivalric class. Third, in Malory’s emphasis on the feud within and the final disintegration of the Round Table, he might be expressing his anxiety for the division of the country by conflicting noble houses in his own lifetime (172-3). In other words, it would be quite safe for the reader to take Malory as an unexceptional member of the fifteen-century knightly class, who may not be very sophisticated in mind, but who is nevertheless pious and proud of his profession. While such claims are in general valid, Malory might be more sophisticated than Field suggests. As far as this chapter is concerned, I argue that Malory, perhaps unwittingly, discloses the tensions within the chivalric perception of the *imitatio Christi* at its root.

The most noticeable change Malory makes to his source, the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*, is that he removes the exegesis of the knights’ adventures by multiple hermits, which implies a secularized version of chivalry that is quite different from the original version advocated by the Church of

[5] Hoffman even goes as far as to argue that Malory seems to have only read the sources he needs to work from (72). For two comprehensive studies of Malorian style, see Lambert; Field, *Romance and Chronicle*. For various scholars’ persistent reading of Malory as a “simple” author, see Lynch.

former ages.[6] Although there is no direct proof, Malory's attitude falls in line with the ideal of the mixed life becoming increasingly popular in late Middle Ages, which values action in daily life as much as cloistered virtues such as meditation and renunciation of the world.[7] However, despite *Le Morte*'s more secular tone, when Malory's Grail knights are not hacking and stabbing at their opponents with swords and spears (which they do all the time except in the last stage of the quest), their actions contain features that are similar to those in medieval saints' lives or even the Gospel narratives of the life of Christ.[8] While Malory makes few explicit claims that knights should imitate Christ, and medieval people were certainly aware of the fact that unlike Christ who is fundamentally different from humans, saints are more suitable targets of imitation,[9] given the role Christ plays in the *Sankgreal* in what is probably a rather conventional way, it would serve little purpose to argue whether the Arthurian knights are more like saints or Christ himself: after all they share a similar set of virtues and abilities with varying capabilities of performing them, and saints themselves are imitators of Christ. In Malory's presentation of the knights' efforts of imitating Christ, special emphasis is placed on penance that often involves bodily discomfort, because even when medieval people felt

[6] The *Sankgreal* is generally considered the least original in *Le Morte* (Benson 210; Norris 114; Radulescu 326). For the sake of brevity, issues of intertextuality will not be a major concern in this chapter. For Malory's shift of focus from hermits to knights, especially Lancelot, see Benson 205-22 and Radulescu.

[7] For a survey of the ideal of the mixed life, see Constable 1–142.

[8] For a detailed study of the elements shared by *Le Morte* and saints' lives, see Kraemer. For the worship of saints in the Late Middle Ages in general, see Bartlett; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

[9] For some, however, Christ should be the only example to follow, because no matter how saintly a human being appears to be, "the devil will set his imperfections before you" (Constable 243). It must also be added that in real life saints were often regarded "as wonder-workers rather than as examples" (Bartlett 511). Collin Richmond comments on saints' role in daily life that "The spiritual power of once lively and ever holy men and women was evident to those who revered them because it got everyday things done . . . By the later middle ages it was for exhibiting human values to a super-human degree that men and women were regarded as saints" (188).

themselves unworthy to imitate Christ, they still had martyrs as appropriate *exempla*.[10] One of the most striking characteristics of late medieval saints is their involvement in miracles. The accounts of such miracles, linked to late medieval portrayals of Christ's Passion, are often about the saints' suffering and martyrdom (Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* 170). In addition, as will be seen in this chapter, deeds of penance often accompany the knights' transformation during and after the Grail quest.

Curiously, the veneration of saints in Christianity can be attributed to two opposite causes. Richard Kieckhefer explains the issue from the religion's emphasis on the individual: its founder has a special role, the soul gains salvation as an individual, the soul faces final judgement alone, etc. ("Imitators of Christ" 1). It is therefore only natural that the extraordinary individuals, or saints, are highly venerated. On the other hand, Duffy, stressing the Christian Church as a vast community, argues that "Salvation was social, not solitary, an integration into the community of love which was the Church, militant here on earth, suffering in purgatory, triumphant in heaven" ("Religious Belief" 294). In this view of the essence of Christianity, the saints also play a crucial part: they are part of the Christian community and provide direct links to God. The adjectives for three stages of Christian salvation are also worth noting. The life on earth is one of action, thus "militant."[11] The cleansing process in purgatory is full of suffering, but this suffering far exceeds bodily pain. As has been widely suggested by medieval imaginations of the Purgatory, including Dante's *Purgatorio*, bodily pain is a symbol of and aid for spiritual repentance. Therefore, the ideal life of a knight, like the life of saints, consisting of military

[10] For Augustine's sermon that expresses this idea, see Bartlett 511.

[11] Compare "The life of man upon earth is a warfare" (Job 7:1). Such statements are interpreted both figuratively and literally by various groups. See the section on Crusading propaganda in Chapter IV for details. In this thesis all citations from the Bible are from the Douay-Rheims Bible available at http://www.drbo.org.

actions, penitence, and triumph (both in this world and more importantly the afterlife), can be seen as an elevated model of the ideal of Christian life as it is conventionally understood. Both arguments make sense with regard to their different emphases. Perhaps such is the characteristic of medieval culture, in which C. S. Lewis sees “paradoxical combination of generalizing visions of unity with an intense concentration on the particular”(quoted by Cantor 215).

2.2 Malory's Saintly Knights in the *Sankgreal*

Because this chapter will primarily focus on the *Sankgreal*, which explores the spiritual aspects of chivalry more than any other part of *Le Morte* does, it is necessary to first take a look at the relevant academic debates about thematic issues, which have been going on for almost a century and are still at the centre of Arthurian scholarship.[12]

Opinions are divided as to whether the *Sankgreal* is meant to praise worldly or spiritual chivalric values, and whether the tale is stand-alone or just a part of a larger narrative. For these two questions there are influential combatants on both sides. This debate was initiated by Professor Vinaver, who in his early career asserts in *Malory* that "[The *Sankgreal* is] a confused and almost pointless story, a beautiful parade of symbols and bright visions . . . deprived of its spiritual foundation, of its doctrine, and of its direct object" (84). Later in his celebrated standard edition of Malory's *Works*, in which he suggests that Malory intended the stories as self-contained and that the quest for the Holy Grail has no causal link to the downfall of the Arthurian court (viii-ix), he further argues that the purpose of the Grail quest is "as an opportunity offered to the knights of the Round Table to achieve still greater glory in this world . . . And so throughout the story Malory is primarily concerned with 'erthly worship' and the consequent attempt to secularize the Grail theme as much as the story will allow" (758). The religiosity of the *Sankgreal*, according to Vinaver, is no more than a layer of ornament for the chivalric code, which is deeply rooted in this world. Ironically, even Vinaver himself has to acknowledge in *Malory* that "the story of the Grail has more in common with the lives of the saints than with any romantic tradition" (72).

Acknowledging chivalry's religious foundation, Donald R. Howard in his

[12] For a survey of scholarly debates on the theme of the *Sankgreal* with regard to Malory's adaptations of his French source, see Radulescu.

analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* maintains that “chivalry was at base a worldly institution. It originated in feudalism, and its chief concern from the outset was self-interest” (219). However persuasive Howard’s and Vinaver’s arguments are, it cannot be denied that the chivalric code, no matter how secularized it could have been in practice, gained a great deal of its momentum and attraction from Christian teachings and was so intertwined with religion that it could not be purely worldly, at least not in late medieval England. Religious messages abound in some of the finest medieval English romances (the rejection of the world’s mutability as the moral of Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale, the hidden moral test and the acceptance of human fallibility in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and in *Le Morte*, the religious endeavours of, first the Grail Knights, and later Lancelot). So far there have been quite a few critics who argue against Vinaver’s statement, and who manage to show that the *Sankgreal*, as the most religious tale in *Le Morte*, is central to the theme of the whole work.

Some of Vinaver’s representative opponents are D. S. Brewer, P. E. Tucker, Charles Moorman, and Larry D. Benson. Brewer points out that *Le Morte* is full of “impressions of unity of atmosphere and of underlying concepts which Professor Vinaver himself has never denied, and which are an important part of the general literary effect” (“The Hoole Book” 42). In other words, Malory’s corpus is an inter-connected whole, and the *Sankgreal* is closely linked to the episodes before and after it. Malory does remove a large amount of religious elaboration from the *Sankgreal*, but in being treated in this manner, the story of the Grail, instead of entirely losing its religious foundation, manages to achieve something quite distinct from the monastic values embedded in the French *Queste*. For the *Sankgreal* in particular, Brewer suggests that Malory’s message in his adaptation of the story is not the superiority of celestial chivalry over worldly chivalry we find in the French

Queste, but that "there is no essential incompatibility between the values of Christianity and those of the High Order of Knighthood, of ideal Arthurian chivalry" (58). Brewer further observes "the characteristic English tendency to turn other-worldly and ascetic religion into this-worldly morality" (58).[13] Although Brewer in his discussion of the *Sankgreal* says little about characters other than Lancelot, his remarks on the goal of *Le Morte*, the relationship between Christian values and the chivalric code, and the special English reconciliation between two value systems, all provide valuable insights when we look at Malory's characterization that is based on these intellectual foundations. Tucker, seeing Malory's valuing of chivalry as something reconcilable with religion, proposes that Malory in writing the *Sankgreal* rejects the ideal of chivalry of his French sources, and then he gradually discovers his own ideal (64). For Malory, good chivalry is influenced by and derives from the life of perfection and renunciation, but the second way of life is not for everyone, but is "a way that Malory will accept only when the life of chivalry has failed" (91). Malory, like many of his contemporary laity, did not regard the life of renunciation as the exclusive way to salvation. By examining three groups of changes Malory makes in the *Sankgreal*, which are those in religious material, characterization and connections to the other sections, Moorman argues that the *Sankgreal*, unlike what Vinaver proposes in *Works*, is never meant to be an isolated work. Besides, while Vinaver regards Lancelot's self-criticism of his worldly desires as a praise of his worldly achievement, Moorman believes that in that passage Malory "actually uses this comparison between chivalric success and religious failure to condemn the perfect hero" (194). Benson attributes the differences between the French *Queste* and *Le Morte* to the

[13] Similarly, Noguchi suggests that "[the] late medieval trend to extremes in action, thought, and feeling is kept in check in Malory by a sense of balance and by a certain kind of scepticism" (24).

authors' different backgrounds, arguing that in the time of the *Queste*'s composition, romance chivalry was still a secular literary ideal, while in the time of Malory "chivalry had become respectable in the eyes of both Church and state, and the chivalric code . . . the ideal of an important segment of society," with which Malory identified himself (208). Therefore, while Malory shifted the focus from hermits to knights and from contemplation to action, the ultimate aim of earthly knighthood is still happiness in the next world.

Jill Mann, on the other hand, shares Vinaver's view that the *Sankgreal* is primarily an exaltation of chivalry, but she believes that even the French *Queste*'s primary concern is the praise of chivalry, questioning the traditional hypothesis of the romance's author as a Cistercian monk (207). Quoting Jean Frappier, Mann claims, "Instead of representing an attempt to appropriate chivalry for religious ends, the Grail romances use religion as a means of exalting the dignity of the knightly class" (208). When commenting on Malory's mass removal of religious materials from the *Queste*, Mann argues that in doing so Malory makes the pattern of its symbolic narrative clearer, because the commentaries in the French *Queste* "not only blur the narrative line, but also tend to reduce its symbols to a set of cryptograms, whose imagistic power is discarded as they are decoded into moral instruction" (209). Mann sees in both Grail romances an exclusive concern with chivalry rather than religion, and Malory does a better job to articulate that concern. Richard Barber also believes that Malory does not "require a higher motive for knighthood than good deeds in this world" (*The Knight and Chivalry* 354). Similarly, Terence McCarthy suggests that the *Sankgreal* softens attacks on Lancelot's sins, and where this is not possible Malory praises Lancelot's worldly achievement instead, thus identifying "sinful" with "earthly" (96–97). Because sinning is inevitable in humanity, McCarthy further argues, it is "no cause for rejection in itself" (97).

I argue that in the accounts of chivalry one finds in the *Sankgreal*, it is often difficult to distinguish between the secular and religious. One of the recent studies of the theme of the *Sankgreal* is undertaken by analysing Malory's characterization of his knights (to a less degree, noble ladies) and then comparing it to that of medieval saints' lives. Kraemer explores Malory's possible intentions in writing the *Sankgreal* by examining fifteenth-century English interest in saints' lives, the generic saintly qualities in the lives, and how Malorian characters share these qualities. The major conclusion he draws is that the distinction between saints' lives and chivalric romance in Malory's time may have been minute, and the debate over the nature of the *Sankgreal* may be simply non-existent for fifteenth-century English readers. With his meticulous and scholarly examination of the saintly qualities in the *Sankgreal*, Kraemer has managed to illustrate that there is indeed much resemblance between the Grail knights and saints in fifteenth-century hagiography. One of the reasons for such similarities might be that romancers and hagiographers were all under the influence of the same Christian ideal of life, the *imitatio Christi*. Kieckhefer lists the most remarkable saintly features, all of which ultimately derive from Christ: asceticism, contemplation, action, miracles and visions, and because it was the monks who defined these traits, asceticism "quickly took on fundamental importance" (12-3). All these five symbols of saintliness, as we will see in the following sections, are to be found in the depiction of Malory's Grail knights. In addition, the two traditions of the *imitatio* are often intermingled in these narratives. I argue that Malory, by exploring the tensions both between these two traditions and within each of them, in fact suggests that although celestial knighthood is superior to secular knighthood, it is impossible for human beings to fully live up to the former's requirements. For Malory's fallible knights, the way to spiritual excellence lies along the arduous pathway of penance.

2.3 The Holy Grail and Imitating Christ

Although the Holy Grail is the one and only goal for the knights in the *Sankgreal*, and the completion of the quest takes a heavy toll on the entire Arthurian court, interestingly no character in *Le Morte* ever asks the meaning of the Grail (McCarthy 39). Because there is little I could add to the extant scholarship on the history of the notion of the Holy Grail,[14] in this very short section I only would like to briefly discuss some of its qualities and how these qualities are related to the ideal of the *imitatio*.

In chivalric romance the word "quest" linguistically remained for a long time a term for hunting practices (hence "the questing beast" in Malory, etc.), before it started to refer to the quest for the Holy Grail specifically. Often in both continental and English narratives of this quest "violent participation in worldly power, militarism, and conquest is dissolved in an entirely spiritual fulfilment, crowned for the best by death" (Campbell 718–19). Seeking the Holy Grail is a shared goal of the Knights of the Round Table as was prescribed by Merlin (541.39-42). When the Holy Grail appears in front of the knights, tantalizingly it remains covered so that nobody is able to see it. As a consequence, initiated by Gawain who claims that "But one thyng begyled us, that we myght nat se the Holy Grayle . . . never shall I returne unto the courte agayne tylle I have sene hit more opynly than hit hath bene shewed here" (522.11-7), the majority of the knights make the oath of not returning to the court unless they see the Grail.[15] The quest itself is dangerous enough, and Arthur is worried about the future of the Knights of the Round Table because of possible casualties (322.27-28). Even the reward for the two best Grail knights, Galahad and

[14] Richard W. Barber's *The Holy Grail: The History of a Legend* is the most comprehensive survey of this subject. For a comparative study of the Grail in the French *Queste* and the *Sankgreal*, see D'Arcy.

[15] Compare "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12). Gaining a clear vision of the Grail is analogous to that of Christ.

Perceval, is also death in this world and life in the afterworld. Although in *Le Morte* the Grail is a concrete object rather than an intangible idea, the knights set out to search for divine presence rather than merely a vessel.

According to legend, the Holy Grail was used in the Last Supper and later as a container of Christ's blood, which makes it a symbol of the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist, often also referred to as the *Corpus Domini*, is a celebration of Christ's body and Passion.[16] In the scene when during a mass the Grail knights are given the final task of escorting the Grail to Sarras, Christ himself, stained with blood, emerges from the vessel and reveals his ultimate mysteries (603-4). Mann points out that the significance of the Grail also lies in the fact that blood and body are the key elements in a knight's life, who realizes his own value by shedding blood and harming his body in fighting, and so "Just as Christ's bodily suffering was, miraculously and mysteriously, the means through which redemption was accomplished on the spiritual plane, so the knight's bodily exploits are the vehicle through which his spiritual worth is realized . . . The Knightly body is represented . . . as a vessel containing blood, and . . . it resembles the Grail itself" (208). By the great reverence attributed to the Grail, the romance authors are able to invoke religious feelings such as the desire to participate in Christ's suffering as a way to unite with the latter.

The appearance of the Holy Grail in the *Sankgreal* is consistently accompanied by the following images that are also frequently seen in biblical accounts of Christ (not every one of them can be found in each scenario, though): a white dove, incense, food (the Eucharist), and a messenger (a lady or a priestly figure).[17] The sign of the dove, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, is

[16] For the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, see Rubin, especially 288-346, in which she discusses the spiritual meanings of the Eucharist including the role of Christ's suffering humanity.

[17] See Lancelot's first vision (479.13-7), Bors's vision (482.29-31), and Perceval's vision (495.6-10).

associated with Jesus in all four Gospels.[18] One type of the miracles performed by Jesus is his feeding of the multitude,[19] and Jesus's healing miracles are numerous. The requirement of virginity/chastity for the Grail seekers is implied by the fact that the Holy Grail is often borne by a maiden. Finally, like the messengers bringing the Grail into the knights' presence, Christ's disciples are the messengers for his teaching.

The two major functions of the Holy Grail are healing and providing food, both of which are bestowed upon multiple knights. The Holy Grail "wyth all maner of swetnesse and savoure" heals seriously wounded Perceval and Ector after the former prays to Jesus (495.7). Lancelot is also healed by the Holy Grail (500.18-9). It provides food on multiple occasions. At Pentecost when the Grail enters the hall, "there was all the halle fulfylled with good odours, and every knyght had such metis and drynkes as he beste loved in thys worlde" (522.1-2). Lancelot stays with the corpse of Perceval's sister on a ship for more than a month, during which he is sustained in the way God provided food for the Israelites in the desert (594). Finally, when the three Grail knights are in prison in Sarras, the Grail is sent to them so that "they were allwey fullfylled" (606.1). Not only does the Grail provide life-supporting food and drink, but it is also a source of spiritual aid in solitude, when human aid is out of reach.

In conclusion, the description of the Holy Grail, "Holy" because of the roles it played in Christ's life, shares many similarities with that of Christ, and the miracles it performs are also reminiscent of those performed by Christ. Just like Conscience's pilgrimage for Christ in *Piers Plowman*, for the Grail seekers, the search for the holy vessel is a journey for the reunion with Christ, which is

[18] Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32.
[19] Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14; Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9.

truly possible only in the afterlife.

2.4 Galahad the Christ-like Knight

In the *Sankgreal*, Galahad is consistently portrayed as superior to other seekers of the Holy Grail. Although he is not the only Arthurian knight who succeeds in the quest and manages to obtain (albeit only temporarily) the Grail in the end, the other two Grail knights, Perceval and Bors, are slightly inferior to Galahad in both martial prowess and spiritual perfection. In this section, I aim to delineate what imitating Christ means for a knight in the part of *Le Morte* that most significantly centres on Christ. Some of such traits are in fact similarities and affinities to Christ rather than attempts to imitate him, because being a blood relation of Jesus Christ, among other things, is not really something imitable. Other features, of which the emphasis on spiritual and physical penance is the most remarkable, are efforts to imitate Christ.

As has been previously discussed, the worship of saints was a crucial element in late medieval popular religion. Saints themselves are imitators of Christ, so the imitation of saints and Christ often share a common set of vocabulary, making it very difficult to distinguish one from another. One of the first things that the reader would readily notice in the Grail knights is their noble origin. In fact no Arthurian knight comes from a humble background. Christ's humanity is highlighted in his humbleness and humility, but at the same time it should not be forgotten that he is also a descendant of the Jewish royal family and is seen by his contemporaries as the Messiah. Like Christ, the successful Grail knights turn out to be those who have noble origins but are willing to remain humble at the same time.

Distant echoes of Christ's life are perceptible in the story of Galahad. In biblical narratives John the Baptist proclaims the coming of Jesus. Likewise the advent and future success of Galahad is prophesied multiple times well before he even appears as a character, and such prophecies in general underline his central position in the quest of the Holy Grail. At the very

beginning of *Launcelot* and before Galahad is born, a hermit reminds the Arthurian knights of the unoccupied Syege Perelous, informing them that the knight who is entitled to sit there and who will obtain the Holy Grail will be born in that year (477).[20] An exclusive message is also given to Lancelot by supernatural means during his first adventure, when a tombstone foretells that a leopard will engender a lion which "SHALL PASSE ALL OTHER KNYGHTES" (478.42). The leopard and the lion are easily identified as Lancelot and Galahad respectively. King Pelles also knows clearly that the child of Lancelot and Eleyne will be called Galahad, "the good knyght by whom all the forayne cuntrey shulde be brought oute of daunger; and by hym the Holy Grayle sholde be encheved" (479.30-2). Similar messages are later delivered to Bors, who gains a vision of the Grail after learning the origin of Galahad. This time Galahad is not only superior to the other knights in general, but he is specifically contrasted with his father. It is the lady holding the Holy Grail who says to Bors

> Wyte you well, sir Bors, that this chylde, sir Galahad, shell sytte in the Syege Perelous and enchyve the Sankgreall, and he shall be muche bettir than ever was his fadir, sir Launcelot, that ys hys owne fadir. (482.32-5)

Not only are the various messengers forerunners of Galahad, but the most important person who comes before him is Lancelot, a sinful knight who is the best to be offered by this world. The birth of Galahad, therefore, can be seen as a *felix culpa*. Sinful humans are redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, an act that makes God's grace more manifest. Galahad is begotten by a sinful knight in an immoral relationship, but it is he who will achieve the glory of the Holy Grail.

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[20] Compare "He said: I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias" (John 1:23).

The prophecies are not fulfilled until the quest proper begins at Pentecost. Twelve nuns, reminiscent of Jesus's twelve disciples, bring Galahad to Lancelot to be knighted (516.2). To knight Galahad, Lancelot temporarily leaves the Arthurian court and in particular Guinevere, two symbols of courtly knighthood. Two inanimate objects reveal Galahad's elevated status in a supernatural manner. New words on the Sege Perelous say that 450 years after Christ's Passion, the seat will finally be occupied (516). A floating stone with a sword in it is later found in a river. Furthermore, on the sword's pommel are these words "NEVER SHALL MAN TAKE ME HENSE BUT ONLY HE BY WHOS SYDE I OUGHT TO HONGE AND HE SHALL BE THE BESTE KNYGHT OF THE WORLDE" (517.24-5). A sword in a stone was seen as the proof for Arthur's royal status previously, and this new sword as a parallel to the old one points to Galahad's even greater superiority. It is now quite certain to the reader that Galahad, the best knight, will gain the sword. After all the other knights have failed in pulling it out, an old man, wearing all white clothes, leads Galahad to the court.[21] Then the seat immediately reveals its ownership by "SIR GALAHAD THE HAWTE PRYNCE" (518.44) with new words appearing on it.[22]

Galahad with ease pulls out the sword, a knight's most important tool of trade. Soon after, a lady on a white horse approaches Lancelot. Weeping, she tells the latter that he "shall nat wene frome hensforthe that [he] be the best knyght of the worlde" (520.28-9). The first proof for Galahad's superiority is his surpassing martial prowess:[23] in the tournament celebrating the departure of the seekers of the Holy Grail, he defeats all participants except Lancelot and

[21] Unlike other unknown adolescents such as Balin, Gareth, La Cote Male Tayle or Perceval, the arrival of Galahad is not accompanied by mockery (McCarthy 39).
[22] The epithet "HAWTE PRYNCE" is probably borrowed from Galahalt in the prose *Tristan* (Norris 116).
[23] During the Grail quest Lancelot is told not to fight Galahad because "hit woll nat avayle no knyght to have ado hym" (555.20-1).

Perceval (521.16-7). It is the Queen who quickly identifies the genealogy of Galahad: he and Lancelot look too similar not to be son and father. Guinevere also discloses their extremely noble lineage: they are even related to Christ himself: “for he ys of all partyes comyn of the beste knyghtes of the worlde and of the hyghest lynage . . . thys sir Galahad ys th[e] nyneth degré frome oure Lorde Jesu Cryst” (521.26-9). To fulfil his potential to become the best knight, good works are essential, and the Queen further reminds Galahad that he ‘ought of ryght to be of [his] dedys a passyng good man” (523.22-3).

Like the sword, Galahad’s shield is destined for him as well, and the way he obtains it follows a trajectory similar to that in which he gains the sword, including warnings given to those who dare to try, their failed attempts, and Galahad’s effortless success. This shield with a red cross, as is told by hermits, ‘oughte nat to be honged aboute the nek of no knyght but he be the worthyest kyght of the worlde” (525.17-9). King Bagdemagus makes the first attempt, knowing with unexplained foresight that he will fail but Galahad will succeed. He soon encounters a superhuman being dressed as a knight, whose name is not for any mortal human to know (525.43). That knight reaffirms that the shield belongs to “hym that shall have no pere that lyvith” (525.37), and later he gives specific instructions to the squire that the shield should be taken to Galahad. This shield, symbolizing the triumph of the new law over the old law and made by Joseph of Arimathea, contains divine powers directly granted by Christ. It both attacks and heals: in greatest danger, an image of Christ’s Passion would appear on the shield to repulse King Evelake’s enemies, and it once restored a hand that had been chopped off (527.8-9). Joseph drew the cross with his own blood, an act reminiscent of Christ’s sacrifice. He also foretells that only Galahad can bear the shield without incurring misfortune, and with this shield he will perform many miracles (527.37-9).

So far Galahad's superior lineage, prowess, and virtue have been confirmed in various ways, in particular by two pieces of equipment attesting to his physical and spiritual pre-eminence respectively. Galahad's spiritual power is further underlined in an episode that is similar to the Miracle of the Swine, especially the presence of tombs and the identification of the exorcists by demons.[24] After he receives his shield, he is led to a tomb in a churchyard. He bravely opens it and a great noise comes out of the tomb. The evil spirit addresses Galahad as "the servaunte of Jesu Crist" (528.21), whose power will drive it back to where it belonged. It continues to claim that the latter is surrounded by so many angels that it cannot harm him. Galahad then removes the body of "a false Crysten man" (528.34) from the tomb. The allegorical meaning of the dead body is soon explained to Galahad. It "betokenyth the duras of the worlde, and the grete synne that oure Lorde founde in the worlde" (528.40). The earlier tradition of Christ as a conqueror is alluded to here, with Galahad actively destroying a symbol of evil rather than by less active means such as prayer. The effects of the wretchedness before Christ's birth were so that "the fadir loved nat the sonne, nother the sonne loved nat the fadir" (528.41.2). This line, when viewed in the wider context of the tales following the *Sankgreal*, should be seen as more than a generic reference to mankind's sinful status. Two pairs of father and son serve as contrasting examples in the second half of *Le Morte*. Lancelot's sinful state is all too clear to Galahad, but they always hold each other in great love nonetheless. On the multiple occasions during which Lancelot is reminded of his inferiority to his son, not once is there any visible sign of jealousy, but he always becomes repentant and seeks to amend his ways (that he often relapses into his previous behaviour is a different matter.) Likewise, Galahad

[24] Stories of exorcism in saints' lives contain similar motifs as well.

keeps reminding his father that he should keep in mind the mutability of this world and aim for the spiritual world instead. On the contrary, it is the hatred Mordred holds for his father Arthur that results in the downfall of the Knights of the Round Table. Christ's salvific grace is made possible only because of the love God the Father holds for the Son as well as for the entire human race, who in a general sense are all "sons" of God. The affectionate father-son relationship between the two knights, a distant echo of that among the Trinity, makes the most remarkable case of familial love in *Le Morte*.

With all the previous claims that Galahad is superior to his father, the former's elevated status is further illustrated by the fact that Galahad's journey is not easily shared by other knights and only a chosen few are privileged to become his companions, which has been made clear from the way he gains his arms. What is worse than mere incapability is that attempting to undertake too difficult a task is sometimes a sign of pride and incurs God's anger and punishment, as is clearly illustrated by the story of Sir Melyas. Melyas, after being exhorted to be a "myrroure unto all chevilry" (529.9) by Galahad, when faced with two diverging roads, too eagerly chooses the more difficult one. After taking a golden crown he encounters an adversary knight, by whom he is seriously wounded. He is only saved because Galahad arrives and defeats two knights in succession. An old monk who used to be a knight arrives and explains the meaning of the two roads. Melyas, he says, should not have "[taken upon him] so rych a thynge as the hyghe Order of Knyghthode" without confession (531.16-7). It is because of this transgressive act that he is wounded. By embarking on the quest for the Holy Grail without being qualified to do so, he has committed the sin of pride,[25] and by taking the crown, he is guilty of greed and theft. The two knights Galahad "the holy knyght" (531.29)

[25] The theme of overestimating one's abilities as a sign of pride is repeated in the stories of Nacyen and Pelleaus (583), which will be discussed later.

has fought off are in fact personifications of the two sins. This episode is comparable to the one in which Bagdemagus undertakes to carry the shield and is defeated. Yet the greatest difference between the two unsuccessful knights is that the latter remains humble throughout the episode, fully aware that only Galahad is the rightful owner of the shield, and the challenge he receives is therefore one of ability, not intention. In such tests of a spiritual nature, the right intention carries far more weight than mere prowess.

Galahad's heroic deed at the Castell of Madyns is clearly an allusion to the tradition of Christ the lover-knight and the Harrowing of Hell.[26] As a hermit later explains to Gawain, the castle is a symbol of the souls imprisoned in hell before the incarnation of Christ with the seven evil guardian knights representing the seven deadly sins. A direct comparison is further made between Galahad and Christ: the former is like "the Sonne of the Hyghe Fadir that lyght within a maydyn and bought all the soules oute of thralle" (535.21-2).

Galahad's superiority to his father is constantly reaffirmed throughout the quest. An old hermit, explaining to Lancelot the meaning of a vision the latter has had, says that he "of a synner erthely . . . hast no pere as in knyghthode nother never shall have" (555.13), but Galahad, a knight symbolized by the lion,[27] "sholde passe all maner of erthely knyghtes" (555.8-9). Galahad, the hermit says, is constantly praying to God for Lancelot, but because on the road to salvation everyone ultimately is self-reliant and as a consequence must bear his own burden, it remains the responsibility of Lancelot to do penance for his own misdeeds. Moved by these earnest admonishments,

[26] For a brief discussion of the history of this literary tradition, see the section on Christ the knight in Chapter III. Note that there are two major differences between the plot of this story and the ransom theory of the atonement. First, while the castle's inhabitants are in bondage to sin (held as hostages by the evil knights), the knights do not have a legal claim on them as the Devil is supposed to in the theory. Second, just like his earlier act of exorcism, Galahad defeats the wicked knight instead of paying a ransom.

[27] It has been foretold by the words on a tombstone.

despite great discomfort, Lancelot willingly endures the pain inflicted upon him by a hair shirt, a relic which used to be the symbol of a saint's obedience to God and the divine protection he was offered (551-2): "[the] heyre prycked faste [sir Launcelots skynne] and greved hym sore, but he toke hyt mekely and suffirde the payne" (555.30-1).

It is time to consider some of the virtues that Malory regards as essential to spiritual knighthood, and how they are displayed by imitators of Christ during the quest. Violence is incompatible with the quest for the Holy Grail. Nacien informs Gawain that although Lancelot used to be sinful, ever since he started the quest for the Holy Grail, he has undertaken to forsake sins. Specifically he has placed more restraint on chivalric violence, for "he slew never man nother nought shall, tylle that he com to Camelot agayne" (563.18-9). If Lancelot continues this mode of life, he would be next to only his son Galahad, Nacien claims. However, Lancelot is believed to be unsteadfast in his acts of penance. As soon as he returns to the conventional chivalric world symbolized by Camelot, he will relapse, but Nacien remains confident that in the end Lancelot will "dye ryght an holy man, and no doute he hath no felow of none erthly synfull man lyvyng" (563.23-4). By contrast, Gawain, an "untrew knyght and a grete murtherar" (563.15), and other knights who commit a myriad of sins, can never hope to see the Holy Grail, which is only revealed to the righteous. These sinful knights will only receive shame during the quest. Internecine violence, which in the end of *Le Morte* causes the collapse of the Knights of the Round Table, seems to be particularly foreshadowed by the symbolism of the sword in the ship and "the Dolorous Stroke" for which the sword once served as an agent.[28] The "scalis of the

[28] There is much confusion about the Dolorous Stroke, suggesting that Malory has not successfully reconciled all his sources. In a previous tale, the stroke is delivered by Balin onto King Pellam with a spear (53). In the *Sankgreal*, the Stroke is first said to be struck

hauffte" is made of the bones of two beasts, one of which makes whoever touches it immune to weariness and hurt, and the other makes its user negligent of past joy and sorrow and focus only on what is before him (580.28-38). The two beasts, while they grant invincibility to the user, render him incapable of thinking about his past (a cause of repentance) and (potentially) negligent of the truly worthy afterlife. The words on its sheath are highly misleading as well. It first emphasizes the extraordinary courage required for the person who dares to draw the sword and the benefits its wielder will enjoy, who "SHALL NEVER BE SHAMED OF HYS BODY NOTHER WOUNDED TO THE DETHE" (581.6-7). Its history says the contrary. Its previous owner, King Hurlaine, a recently converted Saracen and "one of the worthyest men of the worlde" (581.16), with the sword struck King Labor, "the man of the worlde of all Crystyn in whom there is the grettist faythe" (581.22-3). This act, called "the Dolorous Stroke," led to the death of both kings and the desolation of their countries. Not only has the sword brought about the death of two worthy and faithful kings, but it is a symbol of the schism violence causes within the Christian community, a great shame for both parties. Unlike the richly decorated sword, "the gurdyll was but porely to come to, and nat able to susteyne such a ryche swerde" (581.42). In addition, the words on the sheath convey a vastly different message from those on the sword itself. While acknowledging that the user of the sword is hardier than all others, it is only possible if "HE BEARE [it] AS TRULY AS [it] OUGHTE TO BE BORNE" (581.44). The sword cannot be pulled out by sheer force, but only a virgin who has royal lineage, and more importantly, who is a virgin "BOTH IN WYLL AND IN WORKE" (582.6), is able to draw the sword. It is by an

on King Labor with the sword just mentioned (581). Later Nacyen is said to have been struck by the sword on his right foot when leaving a ship, and Pelles has his thighs pierced by a mysterious spear because he dared to tamper with the sword (583), but the phrase "Dolorous Stroke" is used in neither of these two cases.

unremarkable sheath, a symbol of humility, as well as by the righteous intentions of the owner, that this mighty weapon of mass destruction is ruled. On the other side of the sword itself, which is not readily visible, are such words “HE THAT SHALL PRAYSE ME MOSTE, MOST SHALL HE FYNDE ME TO BLAME AT A GRETE NEDE. AND TO WHOM I SHOLDE BE MOSTE DEBONAYRE SHALL I BE MOST FELON. AND THAT SHALL BE AT ONE TYME ONLY” (582.12-4), suggesting that mere martial prowess should not be a knight’s sole reliance, and unchecked violence brings nothing but destruction and regret. Needless to say, the sword, and the unchecked use of violence in general that it symbolizes, is only safe in the hands of a knight like Galahad.

Among the three Grail knights, apparently Galahad is the least aggressive and most aware of the problems caused by violence.[29] After they arrive at Carteloyse, they engage in a battle with many knights and kill them all. Upon noticing the pile of corpses, they immediately consider themselves great sinners. Bors is the first to defend their actions by invoking the divine will. If God loves them, he says, they would not have been killed. Therefore it must be the case that “they have done so muche agayne oure Lorde that He wolde not suffir hem to regne no lenger” (588.9-10). However, the more devout Galahad opposes Bors, declaring that even if they have acted against God, “the vengeaunce ys nat owris, but to Hym which hath power thereoff” (588.12-3). Bors’s self-righteousness is contrasted with Galahad’s humility, patience, and readiness for repentance. A priest later tells them that they have in fact done a good deed, and the dead knights are not Christians as Galahad previously thought them to be, but they were enemies of Christianity. Earl

[29] Yet Galahad is not completely a pacifist, and no knight in *Le Morte* is one. He kills multiple knights to save Perceval (543-4), for example. For a list of Galahad’s violent encounters, see K. C. Kelly 63.

Hernox, the priest says, believed that these evil knights will be destroyed by three servants of the Lord. It is only after receiving divine sanction that Galahad concedes that if God had not willed so, they would not be able to kill them so quickly.

At certain points Galahad displays greater obedience to the divine will than even his closest companions in other matters as well. The first conversation between the three Grail knights after their union is worth special notice. Bors suggests to Galahad that if Lancelot were with them, they would be "well at ease" and it would seem that they "fayled nothynge" (579.34). Galahad replies that "That may nat be . . . but if hit pleased our Lorde" (579.35), which can be interpreted in two ways. He seems to suggest that whether Lancelot is able to enter the final stage of the quest is dependent on God's will alone. What is more, this line could also be signalling a greater degree of submission to the divine will: even if Lancelot were present, whether the selected few will gain complete success is yet to be decided by God.

During the quest, physical separation is often related to the separation of sinful and virtuous ways of life. Lancelot leaves Guinevere and Camelot. Gawain tries to group with Galahad because the latter has encountered numerous adventures, but a monk tells Gawain that Galahad will not have him as a companion because he is sinful (534.15-7). They end up taking different paths, and when they finally do meet, they are on the opposite sides in a tournament and Galahad strikes down Gawain (577-8). On one occasion, failing to recognize Galahad in his new guise, Lancelot and Perceval undertake to joust with Galahad and are defeated (536). They do not meet again until the two less perfect knights undergo trials and do penance, but to set out on the worthier task of finding the Holy Grail, Galahad must depart from his unsteadfast father in the end, and it is foretold by a mysterious voice that they will not see each other again in this world (595.27-8).

So far it has been argued that among all seekers of the Holy Grail, Galahad is understood as superior to all others in the nobility of his birth, martial prowess, obedience to the divine will and restraint of violence, and such exceptional qualities are often presented in ways that are clearly allusive to Christ. However, an important gap is still missing in this pattern of imitation – no counterpart to the suffering but salvific Christ is seen despite the self-inflicted discomforts that are imitative of Christ's Passion. This gap is filled by another character, Perceval's sister, but in a rather disturbing way.[30] And I believe that this episode is among the most illustrative of the dilemmas a knight could face when trying to practice the *imitatio*.

The knights from an unnamed castle maintain that the Grail seekers cannot pass unless Perceval's sister yields her blood. The dispute escalates to a bloodbath where Galahad is seen as "none erthely man, but a monstre" (591.11-2). As is later explained, the owner of the castle can only be healed by the blood of a maiden of royal lineage, and many noblewomen have died because of this evil custom. Fully aware that her life is at great risk, Galahad's sister agrees, because in doing so she will gain "grete worship and soule healthe, and worship to [her] lynayge" (591.39-40). In addition, her voluntary sacrifice ends the confrontation, thus saving her companions from potential harm. The three knights are "eased with the beste" (592.1), but the owner of the castle is "full evyll at ease" (592.3-4). The lady is healed at the cost of Perceval's sister who dies from losing too much blood. Should the story end here with the three Grail knights setting out on new adventures, this episode

[30] Kraemer admits that Perceval's sister is the most difficult for the reader to understand, with Malory's intention not discernible (81). He proposes that she could be an allusion to female martyr saints (82). Kraemer also notes that many critics now believe that Perceval's sister complements Galahad and, quoting Hoffman, who sees her addition as a rather mechanistic treatment, she helps to "insert the absent Christ into the text" (83). For Perceval's sister as the most Christ-like figure while Galahad is "a brilliant, but deeply flawed, compromise" between Christian and chivalric values, see Hoffman 77.

would be yet another case illustrating the virtues of patience and voluntary sacrifice that conquer everything, alluding to Christ's salvation of the human race. However, after the dead body has been taken care of as arranged, "furthewith there fylle a tempeste suddeyne of thundir and lyghtnynge and rayne, as all the erthe wolde a brokyn" (592.36-8). As it is later revealed to the reader, God destroys the castle and its evil inhabitants as a vengeance for the maidens who have perished there. Of course God's saving grace extends to all sinners and Christ forgives those who persecute him because they do not know what they are doing, but the stinging thought that Perceval's sister seems to have died in vain could still haunt the reader, because the story ends not with the redemption and transformation of sinners, but with their complete destruction and the restoration of poetic justice by divine power alone. The reader is presented with a moral dilemma brought about by violence: on the one hand, to combat the forces of evil, the peace-loving and merciful Christ-like hero not only puts the lives of his and his companions at risk, but he also faces the corrosive effects of violence that could bring out monstrosity in him. On the other, appeasing the wishes of the wicked, although it is done voluntarily to avoid further conflict, is ultimately morally questionable. Alternatively, this episode might be seen as paralleling the ransom theory of the atonement: Perceval's sister pays a ransom for the safety of her companions. This interpretation is rather tenuous, though, because it fails to take account of the righteousness of the Grail knights compared with sinful human souls in the original story. Besides, Perceval's sister's blood is the object sought by the wicked inhabitants of the castle, while in the ransom theory Christ's sacrifice is an external force that saves the human race. It is truly remarkable that it is in the character that is even imitative of Christ's Passion on a literal level that one finds the greatest moral ambiguity.

Galahad and the other two Grail knights, having passed all the trials,

finally gain an exclusive vision of the Holy Grail, with Jesus Christ himself as the commentator.[31] After the rituals of the Eucharist are duly performed, "a man com oute of the holy vessell that had all the synges of the Passion of Jesu Cryste bledynge all opynly" (603.26-7). The suffering Christ calls them his own knights and true children, who "bene com oute of dedly lyff into the spiritual lyff" (603.28-9), and because of such transformations as they have undergone, Christ's hidden secrets are revealed to them. However, the mysteries of the Holy Grail are not yet perfectly visible unless they take it to the spiritual palace in the city of Sarras, a task not unlike a mini-sized Crusade, with its goals of conquering the city and converting its people. The people of the land of the secular knights have lost their divine legacy because "[Christ] ys nat served nother worshipped to hys ryght by hem of thys londe, for they be turned to evyll lyvyng" (604.1-2). Conventional knightly obligations now must give way to religious ones, and these three knights need to follow the examples of the apostles who were sent to different parts of the world preaching God's word.

At the beginning of the Grail knights' final journey, Galahad prays to the Grail for the ultimate renunciation of the world that "he myght passe oute of this worlde" (605.2). His prayer is finally answered, for a voice tells him that he will be granted bodily death when he asks for it, and it is precisely at this time that he shall have "lyff of [his] soule" (605.6). Perceval's understanding of such a spiritual matter is inferior so that Galahad has to explain to him that when he previously saw part of the mysteries of the Grail, "[he] was in such joy of herte that [he] trow never man was [that was] erthely" (605.10-11).[32] The joys of heaven, including the beatific vision of the Trinity, especially the

[31] Likewise, in Will's first vision of the Passion in the B-text of *Piers Plowman* Christ introduces the event from a third-person point of view.

[32] Compare Lancelot's unwillingness to return to this world after gaining a vision of paradise.

visage of Jesus Christ, are so great that worldly pleasures are nothing compared to them. The death of the body leads to the life of the soul.

The conversion of the inhabitants of Sarras turns out to be peaceful and smooth. Outside the city Galahad encourages an old man who cannot walk to stand up in order to help with carrying the Holy Grail. Like the paralyzed man in Capernaum cured merely by Jesus's words, the old man stands up immediately at the behest of Galahad. While penitential knights such as Lancelot lead a simple life, wealth is not presented as something entirely irreconcilable with spiritual knighthood, for the Grail itself is placed on a silver table and Galahad makes "a cheste of golde and of precious stonys that coverde the holy vessell" (606.14-5). With the knights' patience and endurance in the background, the conversion of the city takes place, but their success ultimately must be attributed to divine intervention. At first the Grail knights are thrown into prison by the pagan king Estorause, who is mysteriously changed after a year, summoning the three knights to him and asking for forgiveness. To the city thrown into confusion with the king dead, a voice orders the people to choose Galahad as their king.

Finally Galahad's wish to leave this world is fulfilled. One year after he has been the king, a man surrounded by angels guides him to receive the Eucharist. Galahad then "began to tremble ryght harde" as his "dedly fleysh began to beholde the spirituall thynges" (606.27-8), after which he prays to God that he no longer wishes to "lyve in this wrecched worlde" (606.31-2). The bishop, revealing himself as Joseph of Arimathea, tells him that they share two main similarities, which have been previously stressed at various points: they both have witnessed the mysteries of the Holy Grail; they are both virgins. Having bidden farewell to his two companions, Galahad again asks them to remind Lancelot of the mutability of this world. Then a hand takes both the Holy Grail and Galahad to heaven. It seems that neither the symbol

of Christ's Passion nor the Christ-like knight belongs to this world. Galahad, as a knight who is never wounded and overcomes all obstacles easily, "represents an unassailable masculinity that is forever out of reach on Malory's knightly scale of perfection" (K. C. Kelly 63), presumably a masculinity such as that of Christ.

2.5 Other Seekers of the Holy Grail

Although Galahad is not the only knight who succeeds in obtaining the Holy Grail, he seems to achieve that goal with far more ease than his companions. In fact four degrees of perfection[33] can be easily perceived among the seekers of the Holy Grail: Galahad the perfect Christ-like knight who passes all tests unscathed almost effortlessly, Perceval and Bors, two knights who encounter temptations but overcome them (quite narrowly in certain cases), Lancelot, the knight who desires to mend his ways but relapses into his previous sinful behaviour repeatedly, and the rest of the seekers of the Holy Grail, stubborn sinners refusing to repent and reform (their transformation comes at a much later stage, when the Arthurian Court has met its doom and all has been lost). In this section, I aim to discuss each of the last three categories with respect to how they differ from Galahad in order to further examine the qualities that are core to imitating Christ as Malory and his sources see it. Such an examination also helps to shed some light on the tensions within the *imitatio* for the knightly class even in a fictional and idealized setting.

[33] Beverly Kennedy makes a similar observation in her comprehensive study of knighthood in *Le Morte*, although I do not entirely agree with her classification. She descries three types of knighthood in Malory: Heroic knight (Gawain and the majority of the Arthurian knights), Worshipful knight (Tristram), and True knight (Lancelot). For details, see 82–97.

2.5.1 The Penance of Bors and Perceval

It is made clear at the outset that in the quest for the Holy Grail spiritual virtue is essential to the pursuit of secular honour. After Bors attains his first vision of the Holy Grail, King Pelles warns him that at Castle Adventures "shall no knyght wynne worshyp but yf he be of worshyp hymself and of good lyvyng, and that lovyth God and dredyth God" (483.2-4). Mere martial prowess, which does not guarantee worthiness by itself, must be bolstered by faith, otherwise the seeker of honour gains nothing but shame, a message later given to Gawain and Ector. Pelles further suggests to Bors that he should "be clene confessed" (483.12), a piece of advice he takes willingly.[34] It is worth noting that the only thing Bors actually confesses is that he is not a virgin: because of a one-time breach he has had a child with Elayne (483.14-7).[35] Virginity or chastity, as is already quite clear from the example of Galahad, forms the primary demarcation between successful and unsuccessful seekers of the Holy Grail.[36] Bors's penance during the quest consists of several common elements. He is instructed to have only bread and water (564.19-20), because a simple diet humbles the body. Confession is again highlighted because the Holy Grail is only attainable "by clennes, that ys pure confession" (564.12-3). He is also instructed to wear a scarlet garment, a symbol of chastisement that

[34] Compare the story of Melyas who embarks on the quest without confession and immediately fails.

[35] The vision Bors sees obviously foreshadows later events: Arrows piercing human bodies are often seen in images depicting martyrdom, and later Perceval does pierce his own body with a sword. The dragon, as Bors himself understands, is Arthur. The leopard should be seen as Lancelot, who fights against Arthur at the end of the whole work. The one hundred dragons tearing the old dragon probably refer to the rebellious knights including Mordred. The old dragon torn into pieces symbolizes Arthur's death and the disintegration of the Knights of the Round Table.

[36] It has to be noted that the ideal of virginity predates Christianity and is too complex and wide-ranging a phenomenon to discuss in this thesis. John Bugge's book *Virginitas* provides a comprehensive study of the history of the ideal. There are also several recent essay collections that explore issues such as virginity and sanctity, virginity and the chivalric ideal, and monastic views of chastity. See Hadley; Lees; Cullum and Lewis.

covers his armour (564.26-7), whose significance also lies in its colour that is reminiscent of Christ's Passion. Bors also rejects the comfort of sleeping on a bed but sleeps on the floor (565.42-3), and later he even sleeps in the wilderness for more than one year and a half (601.37).

The greatest challenges for Bors involve conflicting sets of secular and religious values and misleading appearances, all of which illustrate inherent tensions in the chivalric code and difficulties in imitating Christ for even a knight like Bors. Like the two women in Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, the symbolism of the colours black and white,[37] as well as the terms used to refer to the fictional characters, might be contrary to the reader's natural first impression. A "good man" in religious clothes interprets a white bird Bors sees as a beautiful and rich lady who will seek the latter's love. Then Bors is faced with the choice between watching seemingly innocent lives perish and losing his own chastity. A group of noblewomen threaten to kill themselves if Bors rejects the lady's love, and when they do not succeed they all jump from a tower. It is soon revealed, however, that these women are fiends. Calling Bors "Jesu Crystes knyght" (572.22), a hermit explains to him the true meaning of his dream. The black bird is a symbol of the holy church, which is white inside. But the white bird is a symbol of hypocrisy, which is "withinfurthe so horrible of fylth and synne, and begyle the worlde so evyll" (572.28-9). The true meaning of such symbolism lies hidden to the mortal eye. Bors has to deal with even greater moral ambiguities in the encounter with his brother Lionel. He first abandons Lionel in order to save a lady in distress, placing the chivalric obligation to help the weak over ties of blood and knightly companionship. Lionel, a man too deep in sins to be worth saving as a hermit tells Bors, is angered by what he regards as Bors's betrayal and attacks the latter

[37] Note that in Gawain's dream, Galahad and Perceval are two white bulls, Bors a white bull with a black spot, and sinful knights black bulls (562).

relentlessly. Bors manages to restrain himself until Lionel has murdered a priest and Collegrevaunce, both of whom sacrifice their lives to save Bors. His refusal to use violence shows his dedication to God and unwillingness to shatter familial bonds, but his actions seem all the more problematic especially considering that he has been informed of Lionel's wickedness. The impasse is only solved when he finally prays to God for mercy and decides to fight back: a miraculous voice stops the pair from fighting, telling Bors that he should not shed his brother's blood and thus placing blood relations above righteousness (576).[38] Bors's story is another fine example of how hard it is to act consistently according to moral doctrines. It also offers an interesting comparison with the sacrifice of Perceval's sister. In both cases innocent life(ves) are lost because the protagonists are hesitant to resist forces of evil, and divine power intervenes while humbleness and refusal to use violence maintain only temporary peace at the cost of the innocent.

Similarly, forces of evil are not readily perceptible for Perceval and it is by even more extreme means that he averts temptation. The first two tests are relatively easy and are accomplished by conventional religious practices and use of intuition: by signing the cross on his forehead he dispels the enchantment of a fiend disguised as his black horse; judging by his religious instincts, he decides to fight for a lion against a serpent, because the former is "the more naturall beste of the two" (546.2-3).[39] The real danger, however, appears in the seemingly innocuous shape of a human being, and to survive the final test great religious insight is required. The warning itself is misleading if he fails to see life in this world as a battle against forces of evil: he is only told that he will be jousting against another knight the next morning with his soul as

[38] Later Gawain's eagerness for chivalric adventures causes him to kill Uwain (560), foreshadowing the disintegration of the Arthurian court.
[39] For saints' ability to domesticate savage animals, see Bartlett 390–98.

the wager. His real opponent, however, turns out to be a beautiful woman rather than a ferocious warrior.[40] Pleading Perceval to take pity on her, she seduces the former with fine meats, strong wine, and finally, sexual favours.[41] Perceval fails the first two tests, and it is by a sudden moral awakening that Perceval does not lose his virginity and fail the most important test.

In this particular scene the body of Christ and Perceval's own body are presented as close parallels to the point that the latter might be easily understood as an imitation of the former. On the point of sinning, Perceval sees on the pommel of his sword "a rede crosse and the sygne of the crucifixe [ther]in" (550.13). Christ's Passion and body remind Perceval of chivalry and his promise, and Perceval, sorrowful "Sitthyn [his] fleyssh woll be [his] mayster" (550.28), punishes his body by piercing his thigh with his sword, "that the blood sterte aboute hym" (550.29-30).[42] This action should not be read simply as Perceval's self-hatred towards his weak flesh, because as he soon declares, he hopes that Jesus would accept this as compensation for his misdeed (550.31-2). Perceval's mortification of his body is aimed at repairing his relationship with Christ, in accordance with the medieval practice of meditating upon Christ's sufferings for humanity and repenting how they have been unworthy of his sacrifice.

The requirement that knights should try their best to help ladies, usually acceptable in a courtly context, is shown as prone to lead knights astray at the most critical moments in Bors's and Perceval's adventures. It is also worth noticing that the three temptations Perceval is exposed to share several similarities with Christ's three temptations with various motifs reorganized and

[40] Compare Christ's joust with Longinus, who is hardly a knight, in *Piers Plowman*.
[41] Note that such elements are also present in the means of penance for Lancelot and Bors.
[42] Hodges suggests that this could be euphemism for Perceval's castration ("Wounded Masculinity" 27).

regrouped by the author.[43] The temptation of hedonism as symbolized by the consumption of food is easily visible and needs little comment. Like Christ who is alone in a desert accompanied only by wild animals, Perceval is isolated on an island referred to as “wyldernes” (547.23) with the lion he previously saved as his sole companion. The pinnacle where Christ’s second temptation takes place visually resembles the mountain top Perceval finds himself on. The temptation of the kingdom is more difficult to discern. As the Devil explains to Perceval, siding with her is the requirement of the chivalric code as it is conventionally understood, and as a generous sovereign lady she gives her followers abundant rewards (549.18), which understandably comprise wealth and power. The Devil’s story to a certain extent might seem a reversed version of that of Christ the lover knight, in which Christ saves a lady from her oppressors as an allegory for the salvation of the human soul. This pair of similar but fundamentally different narratives is yet another instance of the difficulties teeming in the chivalric code when it is practiced.

A few concluding remarks need to be made about the two Grail knights’ final transformation. To continue their quest, the Grail knights must embark on a ship called “Faith.” As the words on the ship and Perceval’s sister explain, whoever is not steadfast, does not wholeheartedly believe in Jesus Christ, and steps into the ship, shall die onboard (580).[44] The ship, *navis*, is a symbol of the ideal church (hence the word “nave”), which allows no sinner inside. After the quest is finally completed, the reader again witnesses changes in clothing:[45] Perceval the virgin knight chooses the more spiritual life, who

[43] Similar elements, of course, can be observed in the stories of Lancelot and Bors, but no such clear pattern is observed in their stories.

[44] As Perceval later explains, he understands that this line means that the unfaithful who dares to enter the ship will die there. However, the text reads “entir nat in no manner of wyse for than sholde ye perish the shippe” (580.12-3). The danger lies both ways.

[45] Previously after Galahad restores health to the Maimed King by anointing the latter with Christ’s blood dripping from the head of the spear in accordance to Christ’s

“yelded hym to an ermytayge oute of the cité, and toke religious clothying” (607.17-8), while Bors keeps his secular clothing. It is told that Perceval lives a holy life at the hermitage at which he passes out of this world, before Bors travels back to the Arthurian court and tells the story of their quest for the Holy Grail.

instructions, the king immediately “leffte the worlde and yelded hymselffe to a place of religion of whyght monkes, and was a full holy man” (604.20-1).

2.5.2 Sinful Seekers of the Holy Grail and Lancelot's (Failed) Transformation

When knights other than the four central characters show up in the narrative,[46] they are usually presented as deficient in virtues that the Grail knights are elsewhere shown to possess. In one major aspect the incompatibility of romanticized courtly chivalry with the celestial knighthood that is tested in the Grail quest becomes manifest soon after the quest is announced. The ladies wish to accompany the knights on the quest until "an olde knyght . . . in relygious clothynge" (523.9) stops them. There is an essential requirement for potential Grail seekers, the old knight says. It is the decree of Nacien the hermit that knights who swear to seek the Holy Grail should not take any woman with them in such a sacred commitment, because "he that ys nat clene of hys synnes he shall nat se the mysteryes of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste" (523.13-4). Restraint from, or even denial of, sexual pleasure, as has been clearly shown by the stories of the three Grail knights, is a prerequisite for the attainment of the higher form of chivalry.

Earlier in the section on Galahad I have already argued that sinful knights and Grail knights differ in terms of their attitudes towards violence, paradoxically essential to chivalric careers but conflicting with the Christian doctrine of peace-loving. The reader would probably find Galahad to be the most merciful knight.[47] The seven wicked knights, whom Galahad defeats but spares, are later met and killed by Gareth, Uwain, and Gawain upon provocation. This contrast is made more explicit by Malory by adding the statement that Galahad takes killing very seriously (Kennedy 117). A hermit rebukes Gawain as a cold-blooded murderer who "[has] lyved myschevously

[46] Of these knights Gawain occupies an overwhelming amount of space in the narrative, while the rest are usually only mentioned in passing.

[47] Compare Galahad's statement that the punishment of the sinful should be reserved for God alone.

many wyntirs" (535.9). Gawain,[48] often portrayed as a good knight in earlier episodes, now seems to be the worst knight who "[has] used the moste untrewyst lyff that ever . . . knyght lyve" (535.12) and who openly admits that he has lived a sinful life for a long time. The killing of those wicked knights, justifiable under other similar circumstances, becomes yet another sign of his sins.[49] The greatest depravity of Gawain, however, lies in his refusal to repent.[50] When the hermit suggests to Gawain that he should do penance, the latter immediately rejects this: "I may do no penaunce, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne" (535.27-8). Ironically, self-inflicted "woo and payne," in fact a major component of penance in the imitation of Christ's Passion, is used as an excuse to indulge in comfort as recompense for hardships in life. In a later passage Gawain claims that he wishes to confess to Nacien, a promise the reader does not see fulfilled. The hermit tells Gawain that lacking "charité, abstinaunce and trouthe" (563.5-6), the latter has deviated so greatly from "the ryght way of Jesu Cryste" (563.3) symbolized by a candle, that he will never gain the Holy Grail. But Gawain's primary concern is still the scarcity of adventures since he began his quest, although it is not too long ago that the eagerness for an opportunity of jousting (on both sides of the joust) caused him to kill Uwain, his former companion in the battle against the seven knights, and injure himself as well. Gawain's indifference is particularly clear in the scene of his departure: Nacien warns Gawain and Ector that they will only find humiliation if they continue their quest,

[48] For a survey of Gawain's mixed reputation in *Le Morte*, see Wheeler 118–32. Bartholomew argues that Malory intentionally does not solve the discrepancies in the characterization of Gawain, in whom "are focused the qualities which propel the Round Table to greatness and the qualities which plummet it to its ruin" (265).

[49] In fact there is one huge moral dilemma here. If human beings leave the punishment of the evil in this world entirely at the disposal of the divine power, the raison d'être of knights cannot be justified. This dilemma is also one of the themes of the story of Perceval's sister and Bors.

[50] For Gawain's and Lancelot's sin of sloth, see Ackerman.

and he further urges Gawain to serve God instead of the Devil. Gawain, however, displays a total disregard of the warning and merely says that because Ector has already left he cannot tarry any longer. As a consequence, Nacien's every effort to instruct and reform Gawain is futile.

Perhaps less noticeably, being denied entry into the vicinity of the Holy Grail has different effects on two kindred knights. Lancelot's failure to enter the Grail room because he is too deeply immersed in sin motivates him to do penance. Ector previously commented that the vessel is only visible to a holy man (495.16-7). On a later occasion when he is denied entry into a hall where the Holy Grail appears, the knight first acts furiously (599), but upon learning that Lancelot is in the hall, his anger turns into shame and he immediately leaves, claiming that the prophecy of his (and Gawain's) failure in the quest has been fulfilled. Shame/contrition is the first step towards complete penitence, but it remains untold whether Ector takes any real action.

The story of Lancelot shows the difficulty of remaining fully penitent and mankind's propensity to sin even for a soul that is entirely willing. As has been discussed in an earlier section, in the *Sankgreal* comparisons between Lancelot and Galahad run through the text.[51] Even the two characters' names clearly indicate that Galahad is what Lancelot ideally could have been: the former gains his name because "Launcelot was so named at the fountayne stone" (481.22) before he was renamed Lancelot by the Lady of the Lake. The renaming of Lancelot might be seen as marking his movement from the state of innocence to a life full of temptations, with the name Galahad linked to the place of his baptism and the name Lancelot used after he has entered the world of secular chivalry.[52]

The father and son are universally regarded as the pinnacles of secular

[51] See Kennedy 111-27.
[52] For the links of "watery cult sites" to the family of Lancelot, see Darrah 97.

and celestial chivalry. In one of Bors's early visions, an old man holding the Spear of Vengeance instructs him to give Lancelot a lecture. The adventure Bors just accomplished, the old man says, "had be moste convenyent for [Lancelot] of all earthely knyghtes" (484.36-7). If Lancelot had not sinned so severely, he would have surpassed all knights in his time. Although it is not yet revealed what Lancelot's sins are, with the loss of virginity being the only item in Bors's confession, probably Lancelot's illicit love with Guinevere is implied here. However, even the old man has to acknowledge Lancelot's superb martial prowess, and "of all worldly adventures he passyth in manhode and proues all othir" (484.40-1). It is in spiritual matters that Lancelot is found lacking. Similarly, on the day Galahad comes to the Arthurian court, the damsel on a white horse informs Lancelot that the latter was still the best knight that morning, but after Galahad was knighted, everything has changed and Lancelot is no longer the summit of knighthood. As the virtue of humility requires, Lancelot says that he was never the best knight. The lady, however, reaffirms that he was indeed the best knight, and even now he is still the best knight "of ony synfull man of the worlde" (520.32-3).

Lancelot, as the best sinful knight yet aspiring to a loftier goal, is willing to do penance, but his problem is that he too readily relapses into his former behaviour, a recurrent subject during his journey. Soon after Galahad's adventure at the Castell of Madyns, Lancelot gains yet another vision of the Holy Grail in an old chapel. Finding no entry into the chapel, in his dream he sees a sick knight praying to the Grail which heals him. Lancelot "was overtakyn with synne, that he had no power to ryse agayne the holy vessel. Wherefore aftir that many men seyde hym shame, but he toke repentaunce aftir that" (537.17-9). The sick knight and his squire comment on Lancelot's sinful state and take away his helmet, weapon and horse. It is at this very moment of being divested of military equipment that Lancelot's transformation

starts to take place.[53] Finally he is fully aware of his sins, as is manifest in his piteous monologue:

> My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For whan I sought worldly adventures for worldely desyres I ever encheved them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no quarrel, were hit ryght were hit wronge. And now I take uppon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges, now I se and undirstonde that myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me, that I had no power to stirre nother speke whan the holy bloode appered before me. (538.7-14)

Peerless as Lancelot is in secular affairs, he now sincerely finds himself wanting in matters of a spiritual nature.

After this Lancelot confesses to the first hermit he encounters, who points out to him the nature of his sins. God has granted Lancelot more worldly honour than any other knight, the hermit says, but because he has not cleansed himself of sins he cannot see the Holy Grail which is only visible to those who are pure. Otherwise the sight of the Grail would only bring pain to sinners.[54] Precisely because Lancelot has greater "beauté, bownté, semelynes, and grete strengthe" (538.38-9) than other knights, he should love and fear God more. Lancelot's primary sin, as he confesses, lies in his love affair with Guinevere. He performs his deeds of arms for the queen's sake, not for God, and he does these no matter whether he is right or wrong. The hermit confirms that his main problem lies in "lechory" indeed (540.9). Even after

[53] Compare how Galahad gains his equipment. The loss and gaining of equipment are symbolic of spiritual transformation in the *Sankgreal*. Benson gives a detailed analysis of the various instances where the Grail knights are deprived of or regain possession of arms, calling readers' attention to "the armor of God as opposed to the false arms of this world" (212). See also Whitaker 84–85.

[54] Compare Nacien's warning to Gawain and Ector that they will only find shame during the quest.

Lancelot has done penance and relapsed into his previous behaviour, he remains humble and does not deny that he is prevented from greater spiritual achievements by his love for Guinevere, and what he has accomplished is “as much as ever saw ony synfull man lyvyng” (611.35-6).

The tension between faith and prowess is clearly presented at the Castle of Corbenic, where a voice instructs Lancelot to enter, promising that he will see many of his heart’s desires. Failing to perceive the nature of the upcoming test, he arms himself and draws his sword when he sees two lions, at which point divine power in the form of a dwarf disarms him. Lancelot, “man of evylle feyth and poure byleve,” another mysterious voice says, should have trusted God instead of his military prowess, and God “myght more avayle [him] than [his] armour, in what servyse that [he is] sette in” (596.3-5). The test presented by the two lions,[55] as it turns out to be, is in fact a test of Lancelot’s faith and courage, not physical strength. Although it seems that the lions are about to harm him, Lancelot passes safely, until he arrives at a room where the Holy Grail is kept.

In the previous section difficult moral choices during the adventures of Perceval and Bors have been discussed. Similarly, Lancelot is misguided by good intentions on several occasions. In one case the conventional virtue of helping the weak prompts him to take the wrong side. Even after he has started to do penance and gained yet another vision of God’s command for knights that they should fight for God rather than pleasures of this world (554), when he sees white knights fighting against black knights, he decides “to helpe there the wayker party in incresyng of hys shevalry” (555.44-556.1). This time, however, his martial prowess fails him, because the black knights turn out to be earthly knights who have not confessed, while the white ones are pure and

[55] Probably this is an allusion to the story of Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 16:23).

chaste. In choosing to help the weaker but sinful knights, Lancelot "enclyned to that party of bobbaunce and pryde of the worlde, and all that muste be leffte in that queste" (557.20-1).[56] The difficulty of making the right choice becomes clearer when we consider that even in a fictional and allegorized world, a pair of binary opposites as ordinary as the colours of black and white could have contradictory interpretations in different contexts. Later, however, it is a trespassing but altruistic act that grants Lancelot a vision of the Holy Grail.[57] Having been warned of going into the room where the Grail appears, Lancelot sees a priest holding an image of the trinity, who is about to fall, and proceeds to help him (597). The beatific vision makes him weary of this world.

Lancelot's penance remains unknown to most of his peers, and from Gawain's perspective, "[Lancelot] ys as we but if he take the more payne uppon hym" (558.28-9). However, in Ector's dream Lancelot is clothed in a piece of clothing that is "all fulle of knottis" before he is placed on a donkey (559.20-1).[58] As Nacien later explains to Gawain and Ector, humility and patience, which can never be conquered, form the foundation of the Round Table, but only the three Grail knights abide by the rules of these two virtues, which distinguishes them from the others. Lancelot's falling from the horse, wearing the knotted clothes and riding a donkey all indicate his penitence and humility. Nacien knows that Lancelot is unstable and unable to fulfil his potential. But he prophesies that unlike murderous Gawain or other sinful knights unwilling to repent, Lancelot at the end of his life "shall he dye an holy

[56] Benson sees this, along with his vengeance on the knight who took his horse, as a sign of Lancelot's relapse into earthly knighthood (213). I would rather regard it as another example of moral dilemmas in the chivalric code: appearances are often misleading, and even symbolism is fluid in its interpretation.

[57] Compare Evelake, who was almost struck blind by God because he was too close to the Holy Grail (543). Similarly, Nacyen and Pelleaus are wounded for trespassing when they embark on a ship that is reserved for the pure (583).

[58] Bors saw a religious man on a donkey (564.2-3). Also note the similarities to Christ the Knight in *Piers Plowman*.

man, and no doubte he hath no felow of none erthly synfull man lyvyng" (563.22-4). The promising future for Lancelot is further implied by the remarkable fact that even after he has seen the Grail and deems himself happy and successful, he still remembers to wear the hair shirt that causes pain to his body (598.8). In a later passage the narrator comments on the importance of stability in general, pointing out that it is the key in both passionate and divine love. Every person, he continues, should hold God before his beloved one. In fact in true love one loves others more than oneself, so that "worshyp in armys may never be foyled" (649.19).

Presumably Lancelot's transformational process comes to an end at the conclusion of the *Sankgreal*. In the rest of *Le Morte* the recognizable underlying structures of cause and effect only function in their immediate contexts in the sequential progression to the final collapse of the Arthurian court. Lancelot seems negligent of his previous lessons and his actions fail to justify the elevated status he enjoys.[59] It also seems to be the case that Malory no longer focuses on the imitation of Christ, but his primary concern is of a very secular nature: the destructive power of passionate love combined with vengeance. Although Lancelot does become a very different person in the very end, the reader does not see a gradual change in his characterization as one would find in the Grail quest.[60] *Launcelot and Guinevere* begins with the story of the poisoned apple, in which the reader is told that "sir Launcelot

[59] This might be a result of the multiple sources Malory uses for *Launcelot and Guinevere*. See Norris 119-39. For discussions of discrepancies in Malory, see Field, "Malory and His Audience" 27–30 and Wheeler 111–12, for example. For Malory's "folktale" style of writing that contributes to the lack of links between certain episodes, see Brewer, "Malory" 98.

[60] For underlying structures dependent upon general and traditional patterns, as well as on the patterns of relationships between established types of characters, see Brewer, "The Presentation of the Character of Lancelot: Chrétien to Malory" 35–52. In particular Brewer points to "a certain mismatch between character and action" (47) in *Le Morte* and suggests that we cannot always interpret characters from their actions.

began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste . . . they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde" (611.10-17). Although Lancelot lives at hermitages after being banned by Guinevere,[61] he still pretty much clings to the secular mode of life, moving back and forth between the Arthurian court and the edge of society. He chooses to fight on the weaker side in the tournament at Winchester, a justifiable move per se, but the reader might recall that last time Lancelot became a champion for the weak he aligned himself with forces of evil (in the Grail quest he fights with black knights against white ones). The outcome of this tournament (Lancelot and other Arthurian knights wounding each other) foreshadows the tragic end. On a side note, in this golden age of chivalry where the story takes place, the boundaries between hermits and knights are rather blurred. The hermit who saves the severely wounded Lancelot used to be a member of the Knights of the Round Table, and he is not a *rara avis*, but "there were none ermytis in tho dayes but that they had bene men of worship and of prouesse, and tho ermytes hylde grete householdis and refreysshed people that were in distresse" (629.13-5). It seems that the possession of great wealth is entirely compatible with such knights/hermits.[62]

Malory's development of the theme of the destructive powers of blood feud and love continues with the Grand Tournament in which Lancelot once again becomes an opponent of the Arthurian court.[63] But the reader might

[61] For how Malory presents their love at this stage as degenerating into "a tormenting and destructive force" see Joynt 94.
[62] The reader might recall the rich decoration of the furniture holding the Holy Grail.
[63] Joynt concurs with R. W. Barber that the Grand Tournament degenerates from a harmless mock battle into a show of unrestrained violence, and he also regards what Lumiansky calls a superficial ideal impression in this episode as non-existent, arguing that this episode is entirely about what has been going wrong in the Arthurian court (103).

find the following episode of the Knight of the Cart particular disturbing.[64] As one of Malory's major inventions (Norris 131), prior to the story is a praise of the steadfastness of love in Lancelot's time compared with mutable love in Malory's present day. In the past people, including Guinevere "a trew lover" (649.34), were said to be capable of maintaining a largely Platonic relationship, but the following story which is supposedly an exemplum of this statement suggests otherwise. Guinevere is abducted by Mellyagaunte, who shares several similarities with Lancelot.[65] They are both members of the Knights of the Round Table who turn against their brethren and they both love the queen. In fact Guinevere's accusation of Mellyagaunte that he is "aboute to dishonoure the noble kyng that made [him] knyght" (651.6-7) could equally apply to Lancelot, who in his love affair dishonours his liege lord. At first, at Guinevere's request Lancelot grudgingly spares Mellyagaunte when the latter begs for mercy. After Mellyagaunte discloses the physical relationship between Guinevere and a certain wounded knight, Lancelot proceeds to solve the issue by a duel. After Lancelot has defeated Mellyagaunte with the latter pleading for his life, he who "had lever than all the good in the worlde that he myght be revenged uppon hym" (662.21-2), seems to succumb to his anger and entirely neglects mercifulness. Yet Lancelot cannot make up his mind and it is only after he gains approval from the queen that he demands Mellyagaunte renew battle with him to death. Lancelot even agrees to fight under unfavourable circumstances in order to lure his opponent back to a duel.

It must be noted that in the first place Mellyagaunte is treacherous in luring

[64] Malory's source for this story is probably the Prose *Lancelot*, but he places the other stories in that work in "Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake" (Joynt 103). Norris also suggests that the Prose *Lancelot* is a more likely candidate than Chrétien (131).

[65] For the reading of Mellyagaunte as a character who reveals Lancelot's repressed desires as his doppelganger, see Jesmok 87–88.

Lancelot into a trap so as to prevent the latter from making it to the duel, and strictly speaking Lancelot is not lying but only revealing part of the truth when he declares that Guinevere has not slept with one of her ten guardians. Yet clearly Lancelot is not a knight of moral probity either, which makes the reader question the rationale for his special status in the following episode. The healing of Urré, which ends *Launcelot and Guinevere* and gives the story a rather optimistic tone by the assimilation of Urré into the body chivalric and the unification of the Knights of the Round Table in a group project, is often regarded as "the successful completion of an adventure of exceptional difficulty" (Norris 120) and the mark of Lancelot's final transformation and attainment of divine favour. Humility, the chief (and perhaps the only, one might argue) virtue Lancelot displays in this episode, can be observed in several other cases, especially when he is compared with Galahad. When Urré seeks healing from the Arthurian court, all fail including Arthur and Bors. Lancelot humbly says that if so many knights have failed he should not presume that he is capable of this task. Only after Arthur twice urges him to do so does he consents to it, although it is not his intent that "[he] shulde passe all othir knyghtes" (668.2). Even when he proceeds to touch Urré, he continues to say that he is not worthy to perform such a lofty deed, and that he is merely a vessel of God's power and grace. Soon after Lancelot touches the wounds they are healed. Seeing this miracle, "kynge Arthur and all the kynges and knyghtes kneled downe and gave thankynges and lovynge unto God and unto Hys Blyssed Modir. And ever sir Launcelote wepte, as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn" (668.33-6).[66] Such actions of divine healing

[66] For a list of scholarly interpretations of Lancelot's weeping, see Benson 229. For a discussion of the associations carried by the image of Lancelot weeping like a child, see Batt 156–58.

with one exception have only been performed by Galahad.[67] If Urré's seven wounds are in fact an allusion to the unhealable seven deadly sins in a fifteenth-century poem (Hodges, "Haunting Pieties" 28), then one might have great difficulty to explain what Lancelot has done to gain such sanctity, for the only character in the Grail story who clearly defeats sins is the peerless Galahad. In addition, either intentionally or not, this episode is placed between two instances in which Lancelot and Guinevere's physical relationship is revealed, thus weakening any argument for the rationale of the divine favour bestowed on Lancelot.

It is in another May (the context for the author's previous discussion of ideal love) that the disintegration of the Arthurian court starts to take place,[68] caused by Lancelot's love affair with Guinevere that is finally revealed. The ultimate transformation of Lancelot, which happens after virtually everything is lost, seems to occur rather routinely. He expresses his remorse about killing former colleagues by mistake, in particular Gareth and Gaherys, and his unwillingness to fight Arthur, reminding Arthur and Gawain how kindly he has treated his fellow knights and of his past favours (689, 696). But the conflict is not resolved until the Pope intervenes. In this case penance is more than an individual approach to imitating Christ, but primarily a means to compensate the dead with penitence, bodily punishment, and material offerings. Lancelot offers to walk "in [his] shearte, barefoote" (696.14-5) from Sandwich to Carlisle, building and providing for a monastery every ten miles.

Despite the aforementioned religious behaviour which Lancelot swears to adopt (which regrettably is never carried out because of the turn of events),

[67] That exception is when Lancelot heals Melyot de Logres (169). The healing of Melyot, performed by a sword and a piece of cloth that Lancelot finds, seems a much smaller achievement than that of Urré.

[68] The following events also happen in May: the birth of Mordred, Gawain's betrayal of Pelleas, and the final battle between Arthur and Mordred. Thus Malory seems to associate May with betrayal (Joynt 105).

he has still not entirely severed all his bonds with this world until after the civil war into which the kingdom descends and which leads to the destruction of the Round Table. His partner in sin, Guinevere, takes the initiative and claims that it is their illicit love that has caused the downfall of the Knights of the Round Table. There is still hope for sinners, she consoles him, for "as synfull as ever I was, now ar seyntes in hevyn" (720.22-3). After all, even saints used to be members of the sinful human race. After Lancelot expresses his wish to follow her path and become a hermit, Guinevere gives the final expression of doubt in *Le Morte* about his propensity to return to sinful secular life. Lancelot, however, in what seems to be a rebuke of the queen, lays the blame on her and claims that he has forsaken the world during the quest for the Holy Grail, and had it not been for her sake, he would have continued to do so and have surpassed all except Galahad (721).[69] However, he does not fully renounce the world before he is denied a final kiss. The seducer in Lancelot's words is in fact the more penitent of the two.

It seems that for the sinful knights renouncing the world is not an entirely voluntary choice, but an exit when alternatives have run out. While there is little evidence for their insincerity in the text, only the final stages of their transformations are presented, which usually combine an ascetic life with self-reproach. Gawain repents for being a troublemaker and wishes to make peace with Lancelot only when he is about to die. Likewise, it is after the death of Arthur that the remainder of the Arthurian court start their religious life. Bedyvere, learning that Arthur has died, "put uppon hym poure clothys, and served [a] ermyte full lowly in fastyng and in prayers" (717.10-1). Guinevere, on hearing the news, "wered whyght clothys and blak, and grete penaunce she toke uppon her, as ever ded synfull woman in thys londe. And never

[69] Note that he previously resorted to this argument during the lovers' quarrel at the beginning of *Launcelot and Guinevere*.

creature coude make her myry, but ever she lyved in fastynge, prayers, and almes-dedis, that all maner of people mervayled how vertuously she was chaunged" (717.42-718.3). Survivors of the Knights of the Round Table flock to Lancelot's hermitage and do not wish to leave, seeing "syr Launcelot had taken hym to suche perfeccion" (722.10). Following Lancelot's example they give up chivalric life entirely and spend all their time praying and fasting.[70] Even their horses are left to wander about (722.16).[71] Finally, at Guinevere's death, Lancelot blames himself alone for the tragedies. It is because of his "defaute . . . orgule . . . pryde that they were bothe layed ful lowe" (723.27-8).[72] This time Lancelot is not going to relapse into sinning.

That Lancelot's final days are reminiscent of saints' lives "has become a standard when discussing the final book of Malory's Arthuriad" (Blanton 52). Cherewatuk argues that "Malory makes Launcelot's tale more of a saint's life" than his two major sources: the French *Queste* and the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthure* ("The Saint's Life of Sir Launcelot" 64). Yet saints' lives might not have been the only type of sources that inspired Malory. More than a decade later in another essay, Cherewatuk refutes the argument that Lancelot repents out of his love for the Queen, claiming that the scenes such as Lancelot's lamenting before Guinevere's grave and ascension to heaven "reveal Malory's precise understanding of the sacrament of confession or penance," and Lancelot's

[70] In reality, members of the medieval aristocracy became clerics usually for profit. They often saw posts in the church as a way to place their younger sons, but to enter the three major orders one must become a cleric. As Jacques of Lausanne, a Dominican preacher bitterly rebukes, "It is singular that our clerks want to be one thing and appear another. By dress and hairstyle they want to seem like *gens d'épée*, but they want to be clerks to receive the profits from prebends; they are in reality neither one thing nor the other, because they don't fight with the *gens d'épée*, and they don't teach the word of God as clerks should" (Dunbabin 31–32).

[71] Cherewatuk notes that one original detail in Malory is that the knights give up the symbol of the knightly profession, their horses (68). Therefore Malory can be seen to further stress the ideal of renouncing the world than his source does.

[72] Not everyone sees Lancelot and Guinevere as completely culpable. R. T. Davies, for example, suggests that "Malory has diverted blame from the lovers" (160).

penance indeed follows the organizing principle as prescribed by Middle English penitential manuals (“Malory’s Launcelot and the Language of Sin and Confession” 68). It seems that even when Malory is (re)telling stories that are less spiritual than the Grail quest, the chivalric romance and other forms of religious writings are perhaps not as distinct from each other as the modern reader may think, but they are all underpinned by a single ideal that is the imitation of Christ, in particular by means of penance.

Just as the Grail appears with a divine fragrance, with “the swettest savour about hym that ever they felte” (724.35) Lancelot passes out of this world. His companions, it is told, all continue their religious careers. In particular, four of them even go on crusades, during which they are killed on a Good Friday. As will be discussed in Chapter IV, crusading, which involves great danger and discomfort, is often regarded as a supreme form of imitating Christ. The coincidence that the knights die on an anniversary of Christ’s Passion suggests strong links between a more elevated form of chivalry and the imitation of Christ. The reference to crusades also echoes the ending of the Grail quest: both groups travel towards Jerusalem, as if the spiritual legacy of the Grail seekers is passed down to their fellow knights. Death, however, is not a mark of failure, but it was regarded by medieval people as the inevitable but desirable end of the Christian life. Duffy argues when discussing the discovery of a wooden staff in a medieval grave that “death itself is being presented as the last long pilgrimage, the culmination of the Christian life conceived as a journey away from the familiar towards the divine” (“Religious Belief” 315). Quoting Victor Turner, he also invites the reader to think of pilgrimage as a ceremony which “temporarily liberates pilgrims from the constraints and boundaries of the familiar by removing them physically and socially from their normal environments” (315).

The final days of Lancelot and Galahad are described in a similar manner.

Both of them express their contempt for the mortal body and the world it lives in. Galahad's "dedly fleysh" trembles when he beholds the mysteries of the Grail (606.27), while Lancelot refers to his own body as "careful," that is, full of care (724.6). The message in the final advice Galahad has for Lancelot, to "remembir of this worlde unstable" (607.4), is brought up right before Lancelot kneels down to the bishop and prays for absolution, lamenting "Who may truste thys worlde?" (721.29-30). They die in a similar way, too. In the bishop's dream, Lancelot is brought up to heaven by angels, while angels bear Galahad up to heaven in the sight of the other Grail knights, and at the same time a hand snatches away the Grail and the spear. By using similar motifs in narrating Lancelot's and Galahad's final moments, Malory implies the former, loser in the pilgrimage for the Grail, has finally succeeded in that of life. It is also worth noting that the paternal relationship is reversed in these two sections – the father has to model his life on that of the son. Although Malory might not have meant anything theologically significant here but was simply following his sources which in turn use common literary formulae, I find it almost irresistible to suggest that a similar idea can be found in Jesus's title "Son of Man": humanity imitates the Son that is Christ. The changing of clothes (including loss and regaining of military equipment) that symbolizes spiritual reformation reoccurs at the end of the *Morte*, where the life of the clergy replaces that of the knight, and not only does Lancelot wear a habit instead of armour, other knights do the same following his example. As Tucker argues, "[Malory] binds the *Quest* and the *Morte Arthur* together through the development of Lancelot's character" (101), and so by foregrounding the efforts the knights, especially Lancelot, make in order to aspire to spiritual exaltation, Malory's message might be that true perfection in the world of chivalry is unobtainable. The only perfect knight, Galahad, is born to perfection; this state is not obtained through his pursuit of chivalry. The figure

representative of fallen humanity, Lancelot, offers a path to salvation which ordinary people could follow, one which combines worldly accomplishments with religious penance. And it is the penitential journey of Sir Lancelot, rather than the perfection of his son, that is the only means of imitating Christ accessible to Malory's readers.

2.6 Conclusion

For medieval Christians, life is a battle against temptations following the example of Christ. While military metaphors are often applied when referring to means of resistance,[73] martial prowess is often useless when the tested are faced with enticements. In fact, such temptations were believed to be all the more difficult to resist for knights, who because of the nature of their profession were constantly in the presence of all forms of temptations. Sir Gilbert Hay, a Scottish knight who was likely to have spent his final days near Edinburgh, once claimed that true knighthood was in fact more difficult to achieve than a virtuous life in any religious order (Kennedy 91).

The quest for the Holy Grail that contains both the spiritual and physical essence of Christ, along with the last part of the *Morte*, provide ample narrative space in which Malory and his sources are able to imagine the way the *imitatio* could be successfully practiced by knights, although the settings are highly fictionalized and idealized despite the realistic details. In the *Sankgreal* and the subsequent tales, Malory seems to suggest to the reader that for knights imitating Christ is a tantalizing ideal: Galahad, with all the similarities and allusions to Christ that he has, does not *become* an imitator of Christ, but he *is* one from the very beginning. Like medieval saints who were often invoked for aid more than being seen as imitable role models, for most Grail seekers Galahad is more like a superhuman force than a fellow knight: he is sought by Gawain and others as a source of adventures and the worldly fame they would bring, but he has little physical contact with these sinful knights. Even when the two selected knights, Bors and Perceval, are finally allowed to join him, they need to pass a series of demanding trials first. As for the sinful knights, including Lancelot, who either relapse into sinning after doing penance, or

[73] Such metaphors probably originated from St. Paul's allegorization of armour, shield, helmet, and sword in Ephesians 6:11-18.

refuse to repent at all, their transformation at the very end of *Le Morte*, when all has been lost, seems to follow an inevitable trajectory. Unlike the hermit who saves Lancelot in *Launcelot and Guinevere* and in whom some knightly traits are still visible, the Arthurian knights, just as Galahad and Perceval did, lose all their knightly characteristics in the very end (with the exception of the passing reference to crusading).

Therefore, in *Le Morte*, penance and the renunciation of the world seem to be the only way that ordinary knights can hope to imitate Christ. In particular, acts of penance often involve bodily pain that is reminiscent of Christ's Passion. In the Grail quest, while wounds are often the results of moral lapses (the Maimed King, for example), they also serve educational purposes (Hodges, "Wounded Masculinity" 21). Even Bors and Perceval inflict pain upon themselves as a means of purification. The emphasis on the mortification of the human body is also perceptible in the seemingly unexceptional laments Arthur gives before the knights set out,[74] which "through [the] very excess of repetition [of the phrase "holé togydir"]" reveal the fragility of the chivalric community, as the Grail quest "will indeed break apart the body chivalric, irrecoverably fragmenting it—let alone castrating, mutilating, dismembering, dislocating, eviscerating, devouring, and bursting it open" (K. C. Kelly 61).

Despite all the significance of passivity and patience placed on the ideal of the *imitatio*, violence is an essential part of the knightly profession. Two of the most obvious "archaic" concepts that Brewer suggests as essential for our understanding of Malory are the emphasis placed on chastity (it is still the case in many non-Western cultures nowadays) and the glory in war (Brewer, "Malory" 114–15). Of the two, the latter, and the more general issue of the role

[74] In fact Arthur expresses his sorrow in seeing the knights' impending departure on two occasions: 520.39-44; 522.23-28. Kelly quotes from the first one, probably because the word "togydir" is only used twice in the second passage.

violence plays in knights' efforts to imitate Christ, seem to be the more problematic. As has been mentioned, no Arthurian knight is a complete pacifist. Even Christ himself, who extends saving grace bountifully to sinners, punishes trespassers severely on quite a few occasions in the *Sankgreal*. Violence is definitely presented as problematic, for while the owner of the sword in the ship is supposed to be hardier than others, the word can also be used as a synonym for pride, because King Pelles was "maymed for hys hardynes" (583.30). To make things more complex, when the Grail knights aim at avoiding conflicts, their actions sometimes lead to the loss of innocent lives and cause greater injustice, which is suggested by the story of Perceval's sister and Bors's avoiding conflict with Lionel. The heroes are relieved of the moral dilemmas such events entail by divine intervention only.

Felicity Riddy sees the essential paradox of chivalric life as follows: "knights must, on the surface, be noble and honorable while suppressing the anger and hatred necessary for successful combat in war and tournaments, those 'social rituals which provide sanctioned outlets for aggressiveness and competition" (108). Likewise, knights who aim to imitate Christ must keep a perfect balance between peace and righteous use of violence, which is difficult even for the best knights in a fictional world. Their anger, if there is any, must be devoid of any evil intentions. As will be discussed later in this thesis, theologians took great pains to reconcile violence and Christian doctrines of peace-loving, but their efforts did not always work.

In real life, as is often the case, violence is considered necessary to restore and maintain peace and order in society for the greater good, which posed great difficulties for medieval Christians. The chivalric life in *Le Morte* is largely self-enclosed, and the knights imitate Christ mainly for the purpose of personal salvation. To examine knights' *imitatio* in a more social context, as well as issues such as the relationship between violence and peace in society,

are some of the goals of the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Transformation of Conscience and the *Imitatio Christi* in *Piers Plowman*[1]

Despite being only a very small group of characters, knights do play a significant role in William Langland's vision of ideal society, and this chapter examines the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* and specifically in relation to what it means for knights as discussed in *Piers Plowman*. Lawlor suggests that we might overlook the place of chivalry in *Piers Plowman* because we are "used to the notion of Langland as the poet of the poor and the inarticulate, the rigorous exponent of simple well-doing" (145). While this poem is not a chivalric romance, by utilizing romance motifs and imagery it presents a highly idealized version of chivalry that is to a large extent pacifist. *Piers Plowman* is Christocentric: Christ does everything in the Dreamer's journey. He is the source of inspiration for making the journey; he informs the Dreamer of the means of travel; he goes in front of him in the shape of the Samaritan on his way, and most importantly, Christ is the desired end of the pilgrimage. Specifically, in several parts of the poem, including its climax, Christ is consistently depicted as an emblem of celestial knighthood, against whom secular knights are measured and usually shown short of the ideal. With the *imitatio Christi* being a universal goal for Christians because "No better working example of [the relationship between the natural and the supernatural world] could be found for mediaeval man, learned or simple, than the life of

[1] The text this chapter is mainly based on is the critical edition of the B-text of *Piers Plowman* edited by A. V. C. Schmidt because of the limited length of this thesis and because the B-text is generally regarded as "the most imaginatively powerful version" by the majority of scholars (Simpson 5). As the meanings of the passages discussed usually do not vary greatly in the four texts, I restrict my discussions to the B-text for most of the time. However, when the other texts offer significantly different readings of a certain passage, appropriate references will be made from *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*. For similar reasons, textual variances among the different manuscripts of the B-text are not considered. All the quotations are referenced by passus numbers followed by line numbers.

Christ" (Salter 67), Langland's discussion of imitating Christ is applicable to all professions. But the poet seems to have a special message for knights and other members of the aristocracy. It has to be first mentioned that Langland does not advocate peace without restriction, but he is well aware of the necessity of coercive measures, an awareness that contributes to the tensions within the ideal he proposes. He believes that the primary task for knights is to defend the ordinary people against forces of evil, a duty many either neglect or turn to their own advantage in using it as a justification for personal gains. Some such knights are incompetent, and others use their martial prowess against the wrong targets, who are often innocent and weak commoners. Furthermore, at several points in the poem, failing to use force results in the collapse of social projects so that supernatural aids, including Hunger, Death, Old Age, and finally Christ, have to be invoked to restore social order, with limited success at best because the trespassers often quickly relapse into sinning without immediate pressure. For the most part, however, Langland believes that knights have the potential to improve themselves by imitating Christ, which is chiefly carried out by penance through voluntary poverty and patient suffering.[2] In addition, it may seem rather surprising to find that in this highly allegorical poem the character of Conscience can in certain ways be read as a knightly character, although in some other references to Conscience the term is more like an abstract psychological faculty that tells right from wrong rather than a human character. If Conscience is read as a knight, then he, like Lancelot, undergoes a transformational process (although it happens very sporadically over several

[2] The emphasis laid on penance, which makes grace available to sinners, by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 in its *Omnis utriusque sextus*, might explain Langland's focus on penance as the core sacrament for salvation (Frank 98). But there were disputes as to which of the three elements in penance is the most important. Langland constantly accuses friars, among others, of stressing confession, and he seems to be most interested in contrition.

passus) throughout the poem. In the beginning he is seen as a courtly knight who is threatened by the corrosive power of wealth, but in the latter half of the poem, as the primary defender of the Church, he learns the value of patience and preaches the importance of voluntary poverty and passive endurance in seeking salvation, a task he regrettably fails to achieve in the end. In conclusion, Langland models his ideal knighthood on an emulation of Christ's life, and this model is most clearly discernible by following the journey of Conscience the knight. An ideal knight should be able to combine justice with mercy as Christ has done, but the terms of this ideal are rarely met.

3.1 Christ as an Exemplary Knight[3]

Before discussing other agents of chivalry (or those who purport to be such) in *Piers Plowman*, it is worth examining knighthood in its most idealized form. The reader does not see Christ until much later in the poem (not considering Piers Plowman who appears in the *Visio* and is later identified with Christ), but Langland seems to suggest at the beginning of the whole poem that the chivalric ideal should be based on an imitation of the son of God. In Passus I, the dreamer awakes and meets Holi Chirche (Holy Church), the first of his many teachers. The lady, at Will's request, tells him how to believe in Christ and save his own soul. Quoting St. Luke, she argues that Truth is "ylik to" the Lord and therefore a person should do and say nothing but the truth (1.91). She also has a special message to kings and knights, who should "kepen it by reson . . . [and] taken *transgressores* and tyen hem faste / Til treuthe hadde ytermyned hire trespas to the ende" (1.94-7). Without doubt a knight should be a protector and exemplar of truth, and in restraining the wicked lest they do more harm, the use of violence is unavoidable. However, Langland also sets a limit on knights' jurisdictional power. They should not pass sentences on the wrongdoers by themselves, but the final judgement is reserved for God alone.[4] Holy Church is also the first character to compare Christ to a knight: King David set up an order of knighthood, whose members swore to protect truth (mere fasting is not enough) (1.98-104); as King of Kings, Christ himself knighted ten orders of angels and commanded them by the Trinity to know truth (1.109).[5] In this passus, Christ is a successful military commander, an image in sharp contrast with that of the passive jousting Christ the Knight, which is far more prevalent in the poem.

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[3] One of Langland's contemporaries, Julian of Norwich, also uses the trope of Christ as warrior knight, see Prozesky.

[4] Galahad also holds this opinion, which has been discussed earlier.

[5] C.1.103-4 reads "And God . . . Made knyghtes in his couert creatures tene."

Of course Langland was not the first author to depict Christ as a knight,[6] and calling the later jousting Christ "passive" does not do justice to the other side of his image.[7] Although in general the satisfaction theory of the atonement was more popular than the ransom theory in the Late Middle Ages, in Langland's poem, we might see that he does not draw a clear line between the two, and traces of both traditions are clearly visible.[8]

In Passus XVIII the Dreamer finally attains a vision of Christ's Passion.[9] He dreams of "Cristes passion and penaunce, the peple that ofraughte"

[6] There are numerous studies on the literary tradition of Christ the Knight. Wilbur Gaffney is one of the earliest modern scholars to point out that the jousting Christ is presented following the tradition of chivalric romances that a renowned knight, in order to save a lady who keeps rejecting him, rides to a tournament in disguise so that his opponents do not reject fighting him (156). Gaffney also suggests that in adapting Bozon's original version of the story, Langland entirely discarded the romantic features of the story (166). Rosemary Woolf sees a parallel between the Crucifixion as an act of love and Arthurian chivalric conduct, and the latter fused the idea of Christ the lover and that of Christ the warrior (stemming from the Devil's rights theory) (2–3). More recently, Nicole Clifton argues that Langland reinforces the religious theme by the allusion to the chivalric code so that the audience do not have to be very familiar with chivalric literature (Chrétien's *Yvain*, for example) to recognize the motif of the disguised joust (128). R. A. Waldron, concurring with Le May and St. Jacques that Langland's Christ is mainly the warrior-knight, suggests that the poet makes the motif of the Christ-knight "the nexus of many strands of parallelism between the feudal society of his time and the transcendental society allegorically depicted in the Prologue" (71), a view shared by Laurence Warner, who argues for Langland's indebtedness to the tradition of "Round Table" sermons, which shows that Langland's combination of two theories of the atonement is "neither original nor incongruous" (135). It is also to be noted that similarly medieval monks both patterned themselves after Christ and patterned Christ after themselves (Pelikan 110).

[7] Morton W. Bloomfield argues that Langland is closer to the older monastic tradition of Christ as King and Ruler rather than the suffering and human Jesus (64). He later comments that "the Bernardine and Cistercian revolution . . . seems to have passed Langland by" (100). Similarly, Kean sees kingly power and the ideal of a virtuous life "fused and inseparable" in the incarnate Christ (104). Following him, Reyner suggests that Langland is unusual in stressing Christ the king rather than Jesus the man (52).

[8] Godden makes a similar observation, commenting that "Christ's disguise as man had been a feature of the older redemption theory, as we have seen, but Langland's particular image of Christ as a knight disguising himself in the armour that is human nature suggests that he may have been influenced by the traditional allegory of Christ the lover-knight" (142–43).

[9] Note that the story of Christ's life has been already told in the poem, but it is in its second occurrence that we see Christ as a knight.

(18.9).[10] In this context, Christ's penance should be understood as his voluntary mortification of his flesh rather than the more conventional meaning of an act undertaken for one's past sins. In this portrayal of Christ, it is his humbleness and humanity that are highlighted. The first thing the reader notices is Christ's appearance, who "Barefoot on an asse bak bootles cam prikye, / Withouten spores other spere" (18.11-2). Wearing no shoes, riding a donkey instead of a proper horse, and having neither spurs nor a weapon, Christ (his identity not yet revealed at this point) looks like a lowly figure rather than a knight in the ordinary sense, and so far it seems rather unlikely that he is actually going to a joust.[11] Christ's humanity is also readily visible, for his appearance is a mixture of that of the Samaritan and that of Piers Plowman.[12]

Apart from Christ's appearance, the upcoming tournament is described in a vocabulary that would be quite familiar to readers of chivalric romance. With his victory in the coming joust already foretold, Christ is spirited "[as] is the kynde of a knyght that cometh to be dubbed, / To geten hym gilte spores on galoches ycouped" (18.13-4). At this point he is not fully a knight yet, but he looks like a young squire ready to be knighted and receive golden spurs (Christ, like other human beings, needs to receive an education, and it has been mentioned previously that Piers taught Christ the skills he requires for the salvation of mankind). Then Faith acts as a herald announcing the coming

[10] This line is absent from the C-text.

[11] This portrayal of Christ as an unremarkable figure in fact has a long tradition: in a study of early literary and visual representations of Christ, Michele Bacci argues that "the obvious conclusion is that Jesus should be perceived as simultaneously ugly and handsome, which could be understood as evidence of God's transcendency of all human categories of thought and sensorial apprehension" (Bacci 105). No matter whether Christ's body is regarded as insignificant or repugnant, one thing is certain, that with his moral righteousness contrasted with his plain looks, his other-worldly beauty is at the same time foregrounded.

[12] These two identities may be a bit confusing at certain points. Sometimes Christ is identified with Piers, but in other cases they are different characters. Burrow comments that "the two heroes of the previous dream thus seem to blend into a new composite hero, very much in dream fashion" (*Langland's Fictions* 24).

of Christ to the tournament. Although the Dreamer has been told in the previous passus that Christ is going to joust with the Devil, he continues to be obtuse and has to consult Faith as to the meaning of the scene he is witnessing. Faith then gives him a clear explication of the relationship between Christ and Piers:

> This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers armes,
> In his helm and in his haubergeon, *humana natura*.
> That Crist be noght biknowe here for *consummatus Deus*,
> In Piers paltok the Plowman this prikiere shal ryde;
> For no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate Patris*.
> (This Jesus in his nobility will joust in Piers's arms,
> In his helm and in his mail coat—*human nature*
> In order that Christ be not known here as *God himself*
> In Piers the Plowman's jacket this horseman shall ride;
> For no blow shall harm him in *the Divinity of the Father*)[13] (18.22-6)

"Gentries," as Christ's main motive for undertaking the joust, has in this passus gained meanings beyond martial prowess or secular power. It refers to Christ's salvific love for mankind and righteous anger at the forces of evil. Piers's arms are now identified as human nature,[14] and with Christ's entire set of equipment, including coat-of-arms, helmet and mail, and doublet, being those of human, his divinity is concealed by his humanity, following the tradition in which Christ tricks the Devil as a disguised knight often does in chivalric romances. It is worth commenting on Faith's remark that "For no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate Patris* (Whatever blows he receives cannot wound him in *the divinity of the Father*)" (18.26). By this phrase, Langland may simply

[13] The translations of longer and more difficult quotations are my own, in which I try to be as literal as possible.
[14] Christ, the Samaritan, Charity, and Piers Plowman are often intermingled in the symbolism Langland uses, but Piers is usually distinguished as Christ's human nature.

be suggesting that the overwhelming power of God will protect Christ from any harm forces of evil may inflict upon him.[15] It may also mean that Jesus's divinity, shielded by arms of human nature, would not be injured.[16] However, I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation of this line. Taking into consideration Christ's disguise in human nature in the immediate context, as well as the emphasis on patient suffering throughout the Dreamer's quest for Christ and the fact that Christ is expected to "trick" Death, this line might suggest that it is in fact Christ's wish to not be protected by his divinity but to genuinely suffer so that his sacrifice will save the entire human race.

As is often the case, Faith then corrects the ignorant Dreamer's misinformation about Christ's opponents in the joust. It is not the Jews and Scribes, who are merely human agents of the forces of evil, that Christ will fight against, but the latter is going to directly challenge Death and the Devil in order to tackle the problem of human salvation at its root. Death threatens to destroy mankind, but Life (Christ) will redeem it within three days with his own life pledged. Claiming "*O Mors mors tua ero*, [*ero morsus*]!" (18.35), Faith prophesies that Christ will kill death, a paradoxical statement that illustrates his omnipotence.

The following account of Christ's Crucifixion follows a rather conventional pattern: Pilate acts as the judge, and all the spectators mock Christ before giving him a crown of thorns. Then he is nailed onto a cross and drinks poison. After Christ is for one last time ridiculed for failing to save himself despite being called a king's son, he dies. At this point the dead rise from the graves (it is worth noting that among the four Gospels only Matthew mentions, as an inserted narrative, the rise of the dead after Christ's resurrection rather than his Passion. The resurrected dead bodies are not ordinary human beings

[15] This is the reading of A. V. C. Schmidt in his translation.
[16] This is the reading of Burrow (*Langland's Fictions* 73).

either, but they are all saints. Besides, even in Matthew, the dead only appear to the people in the city, and it remains untold what they actually do. Perhaps Langland here adds an apocalyptic element to his poetry and adds more urgency to the narrative). The expected joust, to which the risen dead are spectators, does not commence until after Christ's death, and we see the fierce battle, still hanging in the balance from the perspective of a previous dweller in the underworld:

> "For a bitter bataille," the dede body seide;
> "Lif and Deeth in this derknesse, hir oon fordooth hir oother.
> Shal no wight wite witterly who shal have the maistrie
> Er Sonday aboute sonne-risyng" . . .
> ("Because of a bitter battle," the dead body said;
> "Life and Death in this darkness, each one destroying the other
> Nobody will be sure who shall be the winner
> Before sunrise on Sunday" . . .) (18.64-7)

However, Christ's fighting has not been completed yet, and the battle between Life and Death is only one of the foretold jousts. Because Christ is "knyght and kynges sone" (18.76), Nature has forbidden every lowly creature from touching his dead body other than a person with knightly qualities, who is not "unhardy, that hoved on horse or stode" (18.83). The man selected for this purpose is Longinus, against whom Christ's second joust begins. Longinus has been blind for a long time (his blindness should not be understood only in the physical sense, but it also means that spiritually, like other spectators, he fails to recognize the nature of Christ) (18.79). As nobody else wants to do that, Longinus unwillingly takes up his spear and pricks at Christ: "this blynde bacheler, that baar hym thorugh the herte" (18.85). With his sight restored by Christ's blood (a restoration which can be similarly understood in both

physical and spiritual terms), he becomes repentant, kneels down[17] and begs for mercy and forgiveness:

> "Ayein my wille it was, Lord, to wownde yow so soore!"
> He sighed and seide, "Soore it me athynketh!
> For the dede that I have doon I do me in youre grace.
> Have on me ruthe, rightful Jesu!"—and right with that he wepte.[18]
> ("It was against my will, Lord, to wound you so sorely!"
> He sighed and said, "It grieves me greatly!
> For the deed that I have done I put myself at your mercy.
> Have mercy on me, righteous Jesus!" and immediately he wept.) (18.88-91)

The Jews, however, commit another atrocious crime in staging this second joust: not only have they crucified Christ as a false prophet, but they also in a cowardly manner trick the blind knight into desecrating a dead body.[19] Paradoxically, although Christ is the only one wounded in the joust (he does not even fight back) and he is defeated in the normal sense, in fact it is his opponent who yields to his mercy in the end. Therefore Christ turns out to be the ultimate winner in this second joust, and the apparent winner is conquered by passivity and patience: "For youre champion chivaler, chief knyght of yow alle, / Yilt hym recreaunt rennyng, right at Jesus wille" (18.99-100). James Simpson suggests that Langland is playing with words here: in calling Longinus a "recreaunt" knight, Faith in fact acknowledges that he is believing again (re-*creant*) (212).

Christ's first joust against Death is not completed yet, and appalled by

[17] For the repetitive pattern of kneeling in Passus XIX and XX, which fuses the revelation of Christ's lordship with religious rituals, see Weldon.
[18] In the C-text, between lines 90 and 91, there is an extra line "Bothe my lond and my licame at ȝoure likynge taketh hit."
[19] Compare Theseus in Chaucer's Knights' Tale, in which the protagonist is angered by Creon's desecration of dead bodies.

Faith's prophesy of the defeat of Death and his verdict on the Jews' treachery, the Dreamer goes down to the underworld where he witnesses the Harrowing of Hell. There he meets four ladies, Mercy, Truth, Peace, and Righteousness and listens to their debate on the justification of mankind's salvation, a debate resolved by Book, who claims that Christ was recognized by all natural elements at different stages of his life. It should not be denied that air and water testify to his divinity by displaying supernatural phenomena, but more remarkable is the impact of Christ's suffering on the appearance of the sun, which "gan louke hire light in hirselve / Whan she seigh hym suffre (locked her light in herself / When she saw him suffer)" (18.245-6), and on that of the earth "for hevynesse that he wolde suffre / Quaked as quyk thyng and al biquasshe the roche (for heaviness that he would suffer / Trembled as a living thing and shattered all rocks)" (18.247-8). Even hell "opnede tho God tholede, / And leet out Symondes sones to seen hym hange on roode" (18.249-50). It is Christ's suffering, rather than his majesty, that has made Hell no longer be able to contain its prisoners. Book once again utilizes military metaphor in describing the battle between Life and Death.[20] Here Christ is "Gigas the geaunt with a gyn engyned, / To breke and to bete adoun that ben ayeins Jesus (Gigas the giant with a siege engine contrived, / To break and beat down all against Jesus)" (18.252-3).[21] Unfortunately, in another siege at the end of the poem, the forces of good fail.

Following the tradition of Christ's tricking the Devil, Langland proceeds to present the salvation of the human race from forces of evil as an act in which deception is defeated by deception. With Lucifer claiming his rights on human souls, Satan reminds him that they were acquired by deception, and "It is

[20] For Langland's borrowings from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus in describing the Harrowing in military terms, see Bennett 80.

[21] In the C-text, the reference to Gigas is removed, and this line reads "For Iesus as a geaunt with a gyn cometh ȝende (261).

noght graithly geten, ther gile is the roote! (It is not duly obtained, where guile is the root)" (18.291). Because it is Satan who first uses deception to lure mankind into sinning, Christ justifies his use of deception by quoting the authority of the Old Law: "the Olde Lawe graunteth / That gilours be bigiled – and that is good reson: / *Dentem pro dente et oculum pro oculo*" (18.339-40).[22] To the modern reader, however, it may seem that the reasoning is not entirely convincing and that the conflicts "should be set finally to rest not by argument but by poetic fiction" (Burrow, *Langland's Fictions* 33).[23] Christ uses his soul as a ransom for human souls, and as a consequence although "reson recorde, and right of myselve" (18.331) that all sinners should remain in hell, strict justice is softened because of his sacrifice. "Ergo soule shal soule quyte and synne to synne wende, / And al that man hath mysdo, I man, wole amende it" (18.341-2). In claiming all human souls, Christ follows the old law of restitution, a part of penance and a central theme in the Pardon scene in Passus VII and Avarice's confession in Passus V. As if to cast away any doubt as to the legitimacy of Christ in resorting to deception, it is soon added that in fact Christ's deception should not be understood in the word's conventional sense, but it is in fact a manifestation of grace: "Now bigynneth thi gile ageyn thee to turne / And my grace to growe ay gretter and widder" (18.362-3). Christ's human nature compels him to have pity on the human race:

> Ac to be merciable to man thanne, my kynde it asketh,

[22] Compare Pizan's stance in her *Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry* on using tricks in war (borrowed from *Tree of Battles*): while it is not right for someone to deceive another in principle, and in fact some tricks are unacceptable, such as feigned truce, treachery in battle is often allowed and sanctioned by God's order to Joshua to surprise his enemy (163).

[23] For arguments that Christ's arguments against the Devil are indisputable, see A. Baldwin; Birnes; Alford, "Literature and Law in Medieval England." Similarly, Burrow also argues that the reconciliation among the four sisters "is a little too easily achieved" (*Langland's Fictions* 33).

For we beth bretheren of blood, but noght in baptisme alle.
Ac alle that beth myne hole bretheren, in blood and in baptisme,
Shul noght be dampned to the deeth that is withouten ende:
Tibi soli peccavi . . .
(But then to be merciful to man, my nature asks it
Because we are brothers of blood, but not all in baptism
But all who are my entire brothers, in blood and baptism,
Shall not be damned to the death that is without end:
To you only have I sinned . . .) (18.376-9)[24]

A king has the final decision on whether his sinning subjects can be pardoned, and likewise it is only by the divine will that the absolving of sins is made possible. However, that does not mean sins will go unpunished and justice will not be maintained. Instead, justice is completely reconcilable with mercy, and for those in need, Christ offers Purgatory as a place for punishing and cleansing (18.393).[25] With justice and mercy reconciled and the harmony among the four sisters restored, the Dreamer awakes with a better knowledge of Christ.

To conclude, in this double joust Christ's dual nature is manifest. He primarily appears as a triumphant conqueror when dealing with forces of evil with his divinity highlighted. However, he is entirely passive and patient when he jousts with the blind knight Longinus and sacrifices himself for the salvation of mankind, underlining his humanity. The harmony between his two natures corresponds to that between justice and mercy, a balance all knights should aspire to maintain. Similarly, Langland bases his depiction of human salvation on both traditions of the atonement.

[24] In the C-text this final line reads "Shal neuere in helle eft come, be he ones oute" (420)
[25] Note that this reference to the Purgatory is absent in the C-text

3.2 The Progress of Conscience and Penitential Romances

Now it is time to look at the penitential knight who aims to imitate Christ. Despite the fact that Langland's poem is commonly titled *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, Piers is not, as this might suggest, the only significant character. Two characters arguably have almost equal significance to the mysterious labourer on the farm: the first-person narrator Will, bearing witness to all the events in the poem, obviously plays a prominent role, and Conscience can be seen as a parallel to Piers.[26] In fact, Conscience is held by scholars as one of the most complex, if not puzzling, characters in *Piers Plowman*.[27] Not only does he, unlike many other personifications in the poem, appear in multiple episodes, but he also occupies a conspicuous position in some of the most significant and most pressing scenes in the poem. We first see him as one of the King's knights (while the rest are not named at all) in Passus II, where he then becomes involved in a fierce debate over whether he should marry Lady Meed. The debate is not resolved until Conscience invites Reason to the court as the arbiter, who in turn discloses the nature of Meed and convinces the King to banish her. After the King has sworn that he will rule his kingdom with Conscience and Reason, "The Kyng and hise knyghtes to the kirke wente / To

[26] See (Higgs 124–25), in which the author lists several parallels between Piers and Conscience: they both appear twice before the last section (Higgs's own division of the poem into six sections); in their first appearances they encounter forces that rebel against God, which are not resolved in the poem; in their second appearances, they are spiritualized and seek to apply idealized solutions.

[27] Late Prof. Burrow would probably disagree with the entirety of my argument. The meanings of the characters in *Piers Plowman*, he says, are in a state of flux, suggesting that "where the characters are concerned, one cannot safely make the normal assumption that a given name will necessarily, from one dream to another, denote the same person or personification" (*Langland's Fictions* 9). Discussing Conscience specifically, he argues that "not even the most dedicated novel-reader should be tempted to reconstruct for him a personal history. Personifications properly have no history. They can neither recall the past nor anticipate the future, and they are incapable of change" (*Langland's Fictions* 10). Of course I totally agree that Prof. Burrow's argument is applicable to most of the personifications in *Piers Plowman*. Conscience, however, as I aim to show, might be an exception.

here matyns of the day and the masse after" (5.1-2),[28] and Conscience is not seen again until much later in the poem. Then in Passus XIII Conscience provides a spiritual solution to the Dreamer's problems and anxieties that have been encountered in the earlier part of the *Visio* and outlined in lines 1-20 of Passus XIII. Conscience invites Will to a dinner together with Clergy, Scripture, a Doctor of Divinity and most importantly, Patience. Patience's speech convinces the host of the necessity for him to experience Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Conscience later leaves with Patience as a pilgrim and they meet Haukyn the active man. Near the end of the poem, Conscience's role is again transformed, this time into a patriarchal figure, a guardian of Unity, in which role he leads other characters to defend the barn, a symbol of the Church, against the siege by the Antichrist and subordinate sins, but fails eventually. Conscience once again embarks on a second pilgrimage to look for Piers Plowman, who is by this time already identified as Christ, and his departure marks the poem's abrupt ending.

According to Sarah Wood in her recent and very comprehensive survey of the figure of Conscience in *Piers Plowman*, critics have not yet fully answered the numerous questions of interpretation raised by the character (*Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 2), and possibly they never will. While many scholars have seen the "static" nature of personification in the poem, [29] there are others who acknowledge Conscience's transformation. Lavinia Griffiths, observing the "radical instability readers encounter when reading personifications in the poem"

[28] Note that in the C-text this line is absent, and there is a lengthy *apologia pro vita sua* at the beginning of Passus V.

[29] See Wood 2-8, in which she argues that the static interpretation originates from seeing Conscience primarily as a psychological faculty. To take an example, see Morton W. Bloomfield 111–12, where he argues that Conscience is a combination of *conscientia* and *synderesis*. Wood also attributes Nicolette Zeeman and Robert Frank to this category (6).

(noted by Wood 8), doubts whether Langland's personifications "will continue to refer to the same person[s]" (6). Lawler Traugott regards Conscience's transformation into the defender of Unity as the result of the importance of patience he formerly learns during the dinner (100). Mary C. Schroeder, speaking more straightforwardly, says the tendency to regard personifications in *Piers Plowman* as static "is a mistake" (13). Instead, she suggests that the meaning of Conscience "results from an accretive process" and that "The process for Conscience in *Piers Plowman* is entirely like that of human education" (19). Priscilla Jenkins, observing the trend to overlook literal elements in the poem, remarks, "the interplay between the [allegorical and literal] modes forms the structural basis of the poem and . . . the contrast between the ranges of experience they can express is central to its meaning . . . [the allegorical mode] suggests idealization and simplification, the literal mode in *Piers Plowman* presents a world of compromise, confusion, and frequent indifference to moral issues" (125). For her, Conscience is the character who distinguishes the literal from the allegorical and is a symbol for Langland's "[refusal] to accommodate his realistic assessment of human behaviour in the simple moral scheme encouraged by the allegorical mode" (128). Wood, while doubting whether Conscience actually undergoes actual education or development, acknowledges that "the themes and arguments within which [Conscience] is presented become a cumulative set of 'experiences' upon which their subsequent appearances . . . are predicated" (*Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 14).

When discussing the concept of change in general, Bynum proposes that there are two kinds of changes: replacement-change and evolution-change, and that in both cases "if change is the replacement of one entity by another or the growth of an entity out of another in which it is implicit, we must be able to say how we have an entity in the first place" (19). The character of

Conscience undergoes significant changes throughout the poem to the extent that his chivalric traits become less noticeable in the latter half of the poem, but I would like to argue that his transformation, in which the intrinsic religious kernel of the chivalric ethos is highlighted, is closer to the evolution mode. It nevertheless has to be admitted that, like many other elements of the poem, the causes and procedures of Conscience's transformation are either implied or not mentioned at all, and the transformation, if there is one at all, happens "off stage." The poem, as an accumulation of dream visions, lacks internal causal links. Thus Wood suggests that there is no evidence that "the *action* of one vision produces any real effect on that of the next" (*Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 9) and Middleton regards the poem as "not quite a story, nor a collection of shorter ones" (92).

One of the implications of saying that Conscience is "educated" in the poem is that he is not a perfect character. As Burrow observes, the three core characters (Will, Piers and Conscience) "at different times experience moments of intense impatience or dissatisfaction, whose origins are somewhat mysterious and not necessarily . . . altogether reputable" ("Words, Works and Will" 123). Similarly, John Alford suggests that Conscience must be paired with Reason to function, and precisely "Because it deals in first principles, Reason is said to be infallible; because it must apply those principles in doubtful cases, Conscience is always liable to err" ("The Design of the Poem" 38). Further, he argues that "It is Conscience's vulnerability, especially to guile and hypocrisy, that makes it the chief target of the enemies of truth" ("The Design of the Poem" 38-39). In this chapter I wish to conduct an enquiry into Conscience's seemingly abrupt transformations and argue that to the poem's contemporary audiences or readers such changes may have been regarded as a familiar and natural course of character development, considering the popularity of chivalric romances in the Middle Ages.

When discussing medieval romancers Andrea Hopkins argues that in making use of the readers' knowledge unconsciously absorbed from their cultural and social backgrounds, "The creators of medieval romances rely to a considerable extent on the reader having a broad familiarity with the ethos of romance—its values, its symbols, its ideology. They do not explain, they do not apologize" (28). The motif of the jousting Christ, as previously discussed, is an excellent example of how chivalric motifs contribute to the theological and spiritual messages conveyed even in didactic medieval literary works. Langland may have had similar assumptions in mind in the episodes involving Conscience. Therefore the missing links in Conscience's journey might not have presented such difficulties to the contemporaries of *Piers Plowman* as they do to modern readers. A special kind of chivalric romance, the so-called penitential romance as defined by Hopkins, which so far has not seemed to gain much attention from scholars of *Piers Plowman*, may have provided Langland with the model of Conscience's development.

Andrea Hopkins summarizes the plot of a typical penitential romance as follows: "An initial period of stability and prosperity is ended, usually by a moment of critical revelation, and the hero is suddenly cut off from all he has known and everyone he loves, and embarks on a period of 'journeying, seeking, and suffering' in solitude, in order to achieve something" (20). The four romances listed in her study share two major similarities: the hero is unaware of his sins at first, and their awakening from ignorance "is sudden, it is traumatic, it is the result of an external stimulus" (20). To see clearly the similarities between Conscience and the hero of a penitential romance, three major questions must be answered first: what are Conscience's sins, what is/are his moment[s] of revelation, and what does he want to achieve? In Hopkins's four romances, *Guy of Warwick* has the greatest similarity to the narrative sequence focused on Conscience, so my argument will be based on

this particular romance.[30] One difference is that the heroes of the other three romances (*Sir Ysumbras*, *Sir Gowther*, and *Robert of Cisyle*), although they are without doubt elevated and reformed in the end, return to the secular world nonetheless, while Guy dies in his hermitage with his soul ascending to heaven accompanied by angels (3511–16).[31] Another is that the other three knights meet agents from God before realizing their sins,[32] while Guy of Warwick spontaneously becomes aware of his past negligence of God and decides to become a beggar soon after contemplating the stars, immobile symbols of God's splendour and order (241–64). Thus Guy can be said to have more agency when it comes to penance, just as Conscience does not have to be told that he needs to mend his ways, a trajectory shared by Will and Piers. Langland's allusion to *Guy*'s heroine Felice, whose "fairnesse fel hire al to sclaundre" (12.46), further illustrates that among other traces of Langland's familiarity with the genre of chivalric romance (especially his use of romantic motifs in the Christ-Knight episode) the poet probably knows *Guy*, at least the story. Yet Conscience differs from typical romance heroes as well. He is not involved in fighting, and his knightly life is set in a purely courtly

[30] References to *Guy* in this chapter are to its second half, or the so-called *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* in the Auchinleck Manuscript. For contradicting interpretations of the poem's religiosity both in the Middle Ages and modern criticism because of its dual focus in the two halves (the first half commonly referred to as "Couplet" *Guy*, which tells the story of Guy's adventures in youth, and the "Stanzaic" *Guy*, which features Guy's realization of his past sins and subsequent pilgrimages as means of penance. While these two poems are probably composed separately, the Stanzaic half alludes to Guy's earlier actions), see Dalrymple (120–21).

[31] On the other hand, Crane argues that because Guy continues his military career and fails to remain anonymous "religious feeling is hardly more salient in the second half of the romance than in the first" (63). Yet we should also notice that Guy puts on his pilgrim's clothes whenever he has won a battle, and he only reveals his true identity to his close friends in strict confidence. After all, even the apostles reveal Christ's identity after being told not to.

[32] A bird sent by Christ informs Ysumbras of his sins and offer him a choice between suffering in the youth or in the old age. An old earl calls Gowther a devil's son before he feels the stirring of conscience and questions his parenthood. Robert is punished by an angel sent by God because of his insolence.

context. In addition, Conscience is assailed by forces of evil after his transformation. Rather, I would argue that he is a mixture of two types of characters. The fact that the name of Conscience is a psychological faculty suggests that he can be read as an everyman character. His traits are typical of his social class, his speeches are about social conditions in general, and his transformation is one Langland wishes every knight would undergo. On the other hand, his similarity to Guy, a character in flesh and blood (yet also idealized through the romance tradition which is scarcely realistic), and allusions to historical events give him a dimension that distinguishes him from other personifications, though many of the personifications in *Piers Plowman* similarly move between representing ideas and existing as social types, and Conscience outside the three stages I mentioned is best read as an abstraction as well.

A general consensus has been reached by scholars as to the scholastic definition of the faculty of conscience, and as Wood argues, it is closer to the Dominican tradition rather than the Franciscan one (*Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 2).[33] For Aquinas, conscience, distinguished from synderesis, is "the application of knowledge to act" (G. Morgan 353). Langland's own definition is that Conscience is to "chalange or chalange noght, chepe or refuse" (claim or not claim, choose or refuse) (15.31). Why, after all, does Langland's Conscience, the faculty of making choices (presumably telling right from wrong), have to be a knight? This question might sound naive and can be seen as committing a sort of "intentional fallacy," but it is important to a better understanding of *Piers Plowman*'s structure and meaning. Among the three key characters, it is almost intuitive for Langland, holding great concern over the well-being of the whole of society, to have

[33] For a detailed survey of the academic discussions of the definition of Conscience in *Piers Plowman*, see Wood 1–19.

representatives from all three estates. We do see Piers representing the labourer at the outset as well as Will the seeker of truth, who is easily identified as a member of the clerical class.[34] Therefore the triad is complemented and balanced by introducing Conscience as a knight. What is more, Piers gradually takes on the attributes of all three estates from acting as a labourer to becoming a spiritual guide and eventually as a knight jousting at Jerusalem. Throughout the poem all three characters gravitate towards spiritualization: Piers is later identified as Christ, or his humanity; Will gains a deeper understanding of the true path to individual salvation; Conscience "loses" his knighthood, or rather acquires a very special, "celestial" one. In addition, the moral choices of a knight, one with power, wealth, and other benefits of the higher social class as well as all their temptations, could make a stronger case for the spiritual transformations Langland advocates. As for the rising merchant class who deal with money, the desire for which is the source of corruption and consequently calls for urgent purification, they do not fit in the traditional social model and Langland seems to have trouble placing them: in the famous pardon scene, the merchants have many years' stay in Purgatory reduced for them but the message is written "in the margyne" and the Pope is unwilling to grant them a pardon (7.18-19). Furthermore, the penitential romances, especially *Guy*, a text extending its huge influence beyond the literary world with its protagonist "appropriated for the promotion of family, civic, and national pride more widely within English culture" (Rouse 94), provide handy models for knights' spiritual transformation. Critics have also discussed the merging of literary genres as a characteristic of *Piers*

[34] Will refers to himself as "an heremite unholy of werkes" (Prologue.3), questionable in terms of piety, but a hermit nonetheless. When taking into consideration such autobiographical references, in particular the lengthy passage in the C-text (5.1-108), we might assume that Will plays the part of the clerical class in the triad.

Plowman.[35] Because Christ appears as a knight at the climax of the poem, it seems wholly natural that in the poem there is a real knight who aims to follow his example. Wood suggests that Conscience only seems to develop within the poem's compositional process. My argument, however, is that the logic behind Conscience's taking different roles because of Langland's combination of different modes of discourses, "a logic that remains invisible if they are read only in relation to the immediately parallel passages in earlier versions" (19) may be more easily perceptible than she suggests, especially to a medieval reader familiar with chivalric romance.

In the following sections, I will analyze the three key episodes one by one. First, I will suggest that Conscience has fallen into Meed's clutches but it is in fact the latter's accusation that initiates Conscience's transformation. Then, by focusing mainly on Conscience's dinner with Patience, I wish to examine the problem of courtesy, an ideal in chivalric romances but one which easily degenerates into indulgence to sins and thus inappropriate in the corruptible real world. Before moving on to the final passus, I will also discuss the passus in between, in which Langland discusses the importance of penance and voluntary poverty as primary means of imitating Christ, as well as the difficulty in keeping the balance between justice and mercy following Christ's example. Finally, Conscience's failed attempt to defend Unity will be examined in the light of the Christ-Knight episode. In conclusion, I argue that Langland's ideal of the *imitatio Christi*, with its emphasis predominantly placed on voluntary poverty and suffering, differs from that in generic chivalric romances, in which the ideal knight is often equally underlined as a valiant warrior or a defender of

[35] See James Simpson's *Introduction to the B-Text*, for example, in which he argues that such fusions create poetry "distinctively Langlandian, and beyond the reach of traditional generic categories" (15). See also Bloomfield, who declares that "it seems that Langland never could decide what form he was using, and from beginning to end, part of the difficulty of Piers to its readers is its confusion and even clash of genres" (8).

Christ. Such an emphasis, I propose, is closely related to Langland's overriding anxiety about the corruption caused by worldly riches, as is manifest in all three main episodes involving Conscience the knight, as well as his belief that mortal human beings would inevitably fail the task of appropriately balancing mercy and justice.

3.3 Conscience vs Meed: Wealth's Corruption of the Chivalric Ideal

Conscience, unlike many other characters that seem to have emerged out of the vacuum in *Piers Plowman*, does have a past. According to Meed, Conscience has served in the Normandy campaign, and he later encouraged the King to sign the treaty of Brétigny. Nevertheless, arguing for Conscience's sinfulness in the same vein as the heroes of penitential romances might be too harsh in wording. As has been outlined in the first section, though scholars have suggested various sources of this psychological faculty in *Piers Plowman*, the general consensus is that Conscience, applying knowledge to action, is guided by reason (Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 2–3), and in the poem the character associates himself with figures carrying positive abstract meanings such as Natural Wit ("I, Conseience, knowe this, for Kynde Wit me taughte— / That Reson shal regne and reaumes governe") (3.284-85) and natural love ("kynde love shal come yit and Conscience togideres") (3.299). As far as Conscience's actions in the *Visio* are concerned, he seems upright in general: seeing the damage Meed has already done and will inevitably do to the King's rule and the whole society, he firmly rejects the King's proposal that he should marry her and together with Reason convinces the King that Meed must be expelled; he and Reason later pledge themselves to counsel the King and rule with him forever. Yet upon closer examination Conscience is not without faults, and the scene of Meed accusing him is particularly disturbing when considering the otherwise almost impeccable image of Conscience in the *Visio*. Conscience's weaknesses, especially the corruption he receives from wealth, are understandably human but undesirable all the same, and in Langland's roadmap to salvation, any small defect needs to be cleansed before one can reach heaven.

It is somewhat surprising that with the huge amount of scholarship about the significance of Meed, few critics have shown adequate interest in Meed's

accusations against Conscience. Observing that Meed herself has committed the sins she accuses Conscience of, Eaton dismisses her "outrage at the supposed injustice of Conscience" as "nothing but a cynical sham" (28). In Nicolas Jacobs's discussion of Meed's rebuttal of the criticism she has received from Conscience, the critic is only concerned with her "sustained *apologia*, or rather a sustained passage of self-congratulation" (361–62). Gerald Morgan leaves out the attack completely before he gives a detailed analysis of Conscience's renunciation of Meed. In several general studies of the poem, the critics all remain silent on this episode.[36] Yet I believe Meed's attack on Conscience deserves more scholarly attention than it has received to date, and I suggest it is crucial to a better understanding of Conscience's development.

The debate between Conscience and Meed sets the stage for the former's initial transformation. The possibility that the characterization of Conscience might have been based on real people provides us with an approach to the character outside the text. As John L. Selzer remarks, there is much interest in the historical events and characters the debate episode might be alluding to. No matter whether Conscience alludes to John of Gaunt as Huppé proposes (Selzer 262) or Edmund Mortimer, whom Selzer himself suggests as a more likely model (263), there is little doubt that behind the persona of abstract psychological faculty Conscience wears there lies hidden a real knight or several real knights, whose faults Conscience partakes of. The fact that Conscience is said to have participated in historical events distinguishes him from the poem's many other characters named after abstract nouns, who usually do not have the same degree of depth in terms of material characterization (Meed is one of the rare exceptions). Conscience's

[36] To take a few examples of such general studies, see Alford, Godden, Simpson, etc.

historicity is also suggestive of concrete knights in romances, many of whom have their specific past stories, and his transformation is what chivalric characters, either fictional or historical, should ideally undergo.

Before the proper confrontation between Meed, "for the poet the most evil and specific form which cupidity assumes in this world" (Frank 20), and Conscience takes place, it is already foreshadowed that they will become bitter enemies. After the marriage between Meed and False is thwarted, the former is led to the King's court, where she declares her vast influence because she is "biknowen / Ther konnynge clerkes shul clokke bihynde" (3.33-34). At this point the King, being a knight himself, already feels the temptation of Meed as a means of securing his rule as long as "she werche bi my wit and my wil folwe" (3.7),[37] thus contradicting the primacy of the law that has been articulated in preceding passus (2.198). On the other hand, Meed is assured that there is no need for her to worry about Conscience, for Clergy promises her that he will take necessary measures so that she will have her way "For al Consciences cast or craft, as I trowe" (3.19). According to the OED, "craft" can mean power or skills in general, but in this context it could more appropriately take the meaning of "Skill or art applied to deceive or overreach; deceit, guile, fraud, cunning," so Clergy is denigrating Conscience before he even shows up. Similarly, a confessor soon approaches Meed, offering her easy absolution, and guarantees that he is "Conscience to torne (to subvert Conscience)" (3.42).[38] With Meed's followers expressing strong antagonism to Conscience at this early stage, the reader is prepared for her impending conflict with Conscience. Yet so far all the accusations are still

[37] Note that in the C-text this line reads "And yf she worche wysely and by wys men consayl, Y wol forgyue here alle gultes" (7-8).

[38] The A-text reads "Among clerkis and knizȝtes, Consience to felle" (41). The C-text reads "And ȝut be they bedman, and brynge adoun Consience / Among kynges and knyghtes and clerkes, and the lyke" (44-5). Also note that easy absolution is consistently regarded as conducive to sinning in the poem, especially in the Unity episode.

unwarranted.

Soon Meed herself plays the role of the accuser. The first phase of the fierce debate concerns whether Meed is useful or harmful. She first declares herself as the key to the maintenance of the King's rule. After Conscience has accused her of faithlessness, lust, and more strikingly the corruption she spreads before he rejects marrying her, Meed in turn accuses the knight angrily as follows:

> Wel thow woost, wernard, but if thow wolt gabbe,
> Thow hast hanged on myn half ellevene tymes,
> And also griped my gold, and gyve it where thee liked.
> . . .
> In Normandie was he noght noyed for my sake--
> Ac thow thiself, soothly, shamedest hym ofte:
> Crope into a cabane for cold of thi nayles,
> Wendest that wynter wolde han ylasted evere,
> And dreddest to be ded for a dym cloude,
> And hyedest homward for hunger of thi wombe.
> Withouten pite, pilour, povere men thow robbedest
> And bere hire bras at thi bak to Caleis to selle,
> Ther I lafte with my lord his lif for to save.
> (You know well, deceiver, but if you will lie,
> You have taken my side many times,
> And also clutched my gold, and gave it wherever you liked
> . . .
> In Normandy [the king] was not troubled because of me –
> But you, certainly, often shamed him:
> Crept into a shelter to prevent cold from your nails,
> Thought that winter would last forever,

> And dreaded of death because of a dark cloud,
> And hurried home because of the hunger in your belly.
> Without pity, pillager, you robbed poor men
> And bore their copper utensils on your back to Calais to sell,
> Whereas I remained with my lord to protect his life.) (3.180-82, 189–97)[39]

Meed fights Conscience on the very battleground the latter has dragged her into, accusing him of charges similar to what she has been blamed for. Conscience has been her companion in the past and taken her money, she says, and he also plunders the poor during the war, bringing them much misery, but the most serious charge is that Conscience deserted the King, while it is Meed who has stood by him in times of trouble, so Conscience is just another Meed, if not worse, and his accusation is a sign of his hypocrisy because he has done the very deeds he criticizes. By speaking of the King's trouble in Normandy Meed is referring to Edward III's Normandy campaign, at the end of which the king signed the Treaty of Brétigny, abandoning his claim to the French throne in exchange for Aquitaine and a huge sum of money (Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* 419n208). Opposition to the treaty was not a rare voice in Langland's time, and Denise Baker notes that "[Langland] ascribes to Meed the same objections to the treaty that are registered in three texts of the 1360s, the *Prophecy of John of Bridlington*, the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, and the *Scalacronica*" (56). Yet in Meed's speech there is no mention of honour, but all is about material gains in the form of money and land: Meed compares Conscience's plundering of "bras" (3.196), copper utensils that understandably would yield little profit, with the huge would-be gain from the attainment of the French throne, and instead of arguing that the

[39] Note that in the C-text the reference to Normandy is removed.

honour of conquering should supersede one's personal material gain or that the loyalty to one's liege lord must override private interests, her reasoning is not related to the chivalric code. On the contrary, given opportunities, one should aim for gaining the greatest amount of wealth possible. Baker sees from Meed's allusion to the treaty that Langland "not only acknowledges that the king appeals to the greed of his soldiers, he also implies that avarice rather than honour is Edward III's own motive for waging war against France" (63). Baker's reading of this crucial passage, however, is based on the A-text, where Meed "made *hym* (the king) merþe mournyng to leue, / And bateride *hym* on þe bak, boldite *his* herte . . ." (Baker 63),[40] while in Schmidt's B-text it is "his men" and "hem" (3.198-99) that she cheers up. Therefore I suggest Langland's message is slightly different in the B-text, but no matter whether it is Edward's or the common soldiers' desire for money that is in the foreground in the passage, Langland seems to be suggesting that the war against France originates from people's greed for wealth.[41]

Of course, contrary to Meed's defensive claim that "I kam noght to chide, / Ne to deprave thi persone with a proud herte" (3.178-79), this is indeed an *ad hominem* attack, a conventional debating technique aimed at questioning the opponent's credibility. Yet there is more to it than that. It might be a surprise for the reader that Conscience's self-defense is conducted at the theoretical level only so that his efforts to acquit himself seem rather weak. After Meed accuses him of cowardice in advising the King to give up France, she defends herself by reminding the audience of the important role she plays in life, a *sine qua non* for every social class. Conscience does not directly clear himself of Meed's charge, but tries to refute her by distinguishing two

[40] Schmidt's A-text reads "And made his [men merie], mournyng to leue. / I bateride hem on þe bak, boldite hir hertes" (3.186).
[41] Anna P. Baldwin also argues that wars in reality were sources of profit for knights (36–37).

kinds of “meed,” one divine and one evil, and it is the latter he claims, that Lady Meed represents. Conscience’s silence is highly suggestive. It is pointless to ask if he has really done those things or whether Meed is lying. What I wish to argue is that because Conscience is best read as an everyman figure, and plundering was not only common but also justified in medieval wars, it is implied that Conscience has indeed robbed poor people and fled from war. With the poem’s focus on the proper use of wealth, plundering might be the graver issue of the two here. Plundering, a means to gain wealth by violence, is something totally incompatible with Christian doctrine despite the fact that medieval theories of war do strive to justify plundering of an enemy state.[42] However, for Langland the way to reach a certain goal matters, and if something is to be gained unjustly it is not to be gained at all. With the *Vita*’s predominant emphasis on the domestic condition in England we can only speculate about the author’s attitude towards plundering on foreign soil, but as the poem becomes increasingly focused on the general human condition, it is highly probable that Langland would hold plundering as an offence against Christianity. In addition, he on several occasions makes it very clear that knights should not rob their countrymen[43] and he might be implying Conscience’s embarrassment by making the knight silent on this point.

When read in this way, the first round of debate between Conscience and Meed can be regarded as the stage when Conscience begins to recognize his

[42] For example, see Honoré Bonet’s *Tree of Battles*, where the author argues that if two kings are at war with each other their civilian subjects are rightfully the enemy’s target. Christine de Pizan borrows from this text profusely in her *Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*, in which she argues that if civilians do aid their lords in any manner, then they are entirely at their conquerors’ mercy (171-2). In reality, acts of plundering were as common among genuine knights as mercenaries. For details, see Keen 228-33.

[43] To take a few examples, see Conscience’s later proposal that “Shal neither kyng ne knyght, constable ne meire / Over[carke] the commune ne to the court sompne, / Ne putte hem in panel to doon hem plighte hir truthe” (3.315-7) in order for the upper class to resist Meed’s corruption. See also Piers’s plea to the anonymous knight in Passus VI and the duty Truth assigns to kings and knights in Passus I.

sins, and unlike the more conventional penitential romances where it is violence or pride that is to be purified, the main flaw in Conscience is his desire for wealth. His greed makes him a lesser evil than the overspreading corruption of Meed, but both have their root in money. One of Conscience's later speeches is highly suggestive of his moral awakening and remorse:

> Alle that beren baselard, brood swerd or launce,
> Ax outher hachet or any wepene ellis,
> Shal be demed to the deeth but if he do it smythye
> into sikel or to sithe, to shaar or to kultour—
> *Conflabunt gladios suos in vomeres* . . .[44]
> (All that bear dagger, broad sword or lance,
> Axe or hatchet or any other weapon,
> Shall be condemned to death unless he has it hammered
> Into sickle or scythe, to plough or to coulter
> *They shall forge their swords into ploughs* . . .) (3.305-8)

By condemning the wielding of weapons as punishable by death and urging all tools for killing be made into farming implements, Conscience is clearly speaking of the end of secular chivalry, to which the use of weapons is indispensible, and there is no doubt he is looking forward to that end. Conscience here might be making a prophecy, or expressing a wish that violence would be eradicated. Looking at this seemingly exaggerated statement one could also feel the urgency of immediate moral reform. Conscience's speech could even be indicating self-hatred and regret that are vented on his own profession. There might never be a definite interpretation of the deeper meaning of this speech, and I have to leave the question open.

To summarize, Meed being a villain does not make her necessarily an

[44] For this line see Isaiah 2: 4.

unreliable narrative voice because Langland's ironical passages are usually easily identifiable. If we take Meed's accusation of Conscience as genuine, for there is no evidence that it is not, and what Conscience has done as a sign of the depravity caused by wealth, then we have the implied stage of Conscience realizing his own sin. It is seeing his own faults manifested in their essence, Meed, that becomes his turning point. All his later actions and speeches share the same theme of the proper use of wealth and are continuations of the renouncing of Meed. As we would see later, this discretion towards wealth will progress to a call to voluntary poverty when Conscience's education is completed.

One of the greatest difficulties in arguing for Conscience's contrition and decision to transform lies in the fact that Langland leaves out scenes of inner struggles or awakenings that are typical of penitential romances.[45] Yet the window to such inner conflicts is not entirely shut, and the reader might get a sense of it from another character/allegorical form that externalizes "inner struggle." Haukyn the Active Man, as the first (and probably only) character Conscience and Patience meet on their pilgrimage, is presumably what the knight would have become had he been involved in worldly affairs for too long. I will further discuss the character in the section on Conscience's meeting with Patience and their subsequent encounter with the minstrel.

[45] Guy of Warwick sees the stars before he thinks about his transgressions and decides to do penance. A bird sent by God tells Sir Ysumbras that he has lapsed from his virtue and offers him the choice of doing penance in youth or old age. Sir Gowther travels to Rome seeking absolution after he becomes aware of his fiendish parentage. It takes Robert of Cisyle a long time to acknowledge his pride.

3.4 Education by Patience and the Problems of Conventional Courtesy and Pilgrimage

After Conscience has gone "off stage" with Meed expelled from the court, Will continues to have a series of dream visions before the former returns. In the remainder of the *Visio*, he sees a group of pilgrims asked by Piers to till the half-acre before setting out with him, the Waster's attack at the harvest, Piers calling forth Hunger to compel the people to work out of necessity,[46] and finally, Piers reading out but tearing a pardon soon afterwards.[47] Then the poem becomes more focused on personal salvation, with Will embarking on a journey seeking the true meanings of three mysterious Do's: Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. During the first part of his subsequent journey, i.e. Vision Three, he tries to fulfil his task through academic enquiries, encountering characters such as Wit, Study, Clergy, and finally Imaginatif. However, such academic pursuits all seem futile, because the Dreamer seems again to be in a spiritual crisis: summarizing his previous learning in 13.1-20, he is

> . . . witlees nerhande,
> And as a freke that fey were, forth gan I walke
> In manere of a mendynaunt many yer after,

[46] Burrow comments that "the doctrine of minimal life-support for malingerers . . . figures as a somewhat unstable compromise between the extremes of justice . . . and mercy" (*Langland's Fictions* 44). Rayner suggests that in reality "hunger was a real and constant threat for many" because of the many plagues in fourteenth-century England. Temperance is the key here: the workers should neither glutton nor starve. Such dilemmas are among the central topics Langland discusses in his poem.

[47] It has to be mentioned that there are a few passing references to Conscience in the tearing of the pardon scene. Merchants are said "Ayein clene Conseience, hir catel to selle"(7.22). This line could refer specifically to the merchants' "impiety and false swearing" (Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* 435n18-22), but might also take a wider implication that Conscience is against doing business in general, which seems a valid reading considering his antagonism towards Meed as discussed in the previous section. In addition, when the priest inquires about the source of Piers's knowledge of the Bible, the latter claims that first Abstinence teaches him the basics and "Conscience cam afterward and kenned me muche moore" (7.134). Conscience's instruction of Piers might be echoed in a later reference of Piers teaching Jesus "lechecraft, his lif for to save" (16.104).

And of this metyng many tymes muche thought I hadde.
(. . . Almost out of [my] mind,
And as a man that was doomed, I began to walk
In the manner of a mendicant for many years,
And had thought many times about this dream.) (13.1-4)

Comprehensive as the academic education he has received is, the Dreamer has much difficulty in fully understanding and putting it into daily practice. His misunderstanding of Imaginatif's words seems the most problematic. The Dreamer remembers Imaginatif say "*Vix iustus salvabitur*" (13.19), that just people will hardly be saved. However, this is only half of Imaginatif's original Latin quotation used to refute the view that non-Christians cannot be saved. What he actually has told Will is "*Salvabitur vix iustus in die iudicii*, / *Ergo – salvabitur*!" (12.278-79), which means that although the just are hardly saved, they will be saved in the end.[48] The complete sentence acknowledges both necessary good works on human beings' side and God's saving grace. In omitting the crucial second half, Will mistakes the insufficiency of good works in gaining salvation for the inability to be saved at all, and thus what should be an optimistic statement of salvation becomes a pessimistic view of the afterlife. Imaginatif's words, misunderstood, seem to be a heavy burden for him, for he "lay down longe in this thoght" (13.21) before falling asleep. Because the academic pursuit of the way to salvation has come to a dead end, Will from this vision onwards must take a different approach.

Soon "as Crist wolde ther com Conscience" (13.22) to comfort the dreamer and he also invites Will to a dinner.[49] No consensus has been

[48] The sense of this line is made clearer in the C-text, which reads "That *iustus* bifore Iesu *in die iudicii* / Non *saluabitur* bote if *vix* helpe" (15.22).
[49] In the C-text the reference to Christ's kindness to the Dreamer is removed, and

achieved as to the role of Conscience in Passus XIII. Some scholars argue that he acts as a teacher in this episode, and it is Will who is taught. James Simpson, for example, claims that with the transition from seeking rational knowledge to moral willing, and the poem's tone changing from discursive to moral, "The burden of learning is now, in effect, on Will himself, as the human will, since it is the will which must choose" (141). Wood also takes Simpson's view, suggesting that "Conscience . . . linked with Piers's non-academic mode of knowing, has no logical place within the dominant mode of the third vision . . . Only with the movement away from academic to more 'affective' modes of knowledge in the fourth vision does Conscience reappear" (*Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* 46). In other words, both critics hold the view that Conscience's transformation has already taken place off stage. While it is true that it is not within Passus XIII that Conscience has his moment of revelation the way heroes of penitential romances do, his decision that he will leave "And be pilgrym with Pacience til I have preved moore" (13.182) marks a crucial point in this passus.[50] Instead of asking questions, Conscience during his pilgrimage is able to instruct Haukyn in the right way to do penance. Therefore I suggest that his transformation is initiated at the point of his encounter with Meed and completed by his dinner with Patience, and it is also in this episode that Langland's criticism of secular knighthood gains more depth by further revealing the problems excessive courtesy in the normal sense could cause.

Although there is still confrontation between the characters in this episode, it is less harsh than the fierce verbal clash between Meed and Conscience, and it also takes a different form. In his rebuttal of Meed's claim of her own usefulness, Conscience not only accuses her as the source of

Conscience and Clergy tell the latter to dine with Reason.

[50] In the C-text the departing scene (15.177-85) is far less detailed than that in the B-text.

corruption but he also blames the whole of society as degenerate, and when the King tries to force the marriage between the two, Conscience's opposition is rather ferocious: "congeye me rather! / But Reson rede me therto, rather wol I deye" (4.4-5). On the contrary, in Passus XIII, the Dreamer continues to be the irascible character always finding fault with other characters we see in the previous vision and seems unrelenting in asking questions. Patience, a personification "of voluntary poverty and asceticism" (Godden 102), is quite happy with the coarse spiritual food and water he has been served with, but the Dreamer, a character with his roots in the world, who therefore must eat real food: "I mornede evere, / For this doctour on the heighe dees drank wyn so faste" (13.60-61). Will's annoyance here might easily be interpreted as a sign of envy, but as is soon revealed by his soliloquy, it actually stems from his righteous anger at the Doctor's hypocrisy: he is not performing what he preaches himself. Thus Will

> . . . wisshed witterly, with wille ful egre,
> That disshes and doublers [this ilke doctour bifore]
> Were molten leed in his mawe, and Mahoun amyddes!
> (. . . wished truly, with very fierce thoughts
> That dishes and platters before this doctor
> Were molten lead in his stomach and the Devil himself amongst them!) (13.81-83).

The outburst of anger can no longer be contained. However, Will's bitter questioning of the Doctor's behaviour is stopped on two occasions, and the fact that Patience winks at him first, which is followed by Conscience throwing a glance at Patience, is happily suggestive. Conscience, Simpson argues, "in keeping with the spirit of patience and self-awareness to which the previous vision had pointed. . . does not attack the Doctor" (145). It seems that Conscience in hushing Will takes over Patience's role in teaching the

Dreamer the need for patience.

Throughout this scene Conscience has been all patience and courtesy. He invites the distressed Will to his house, and he shows the same degree of hospitality to the uninvited pilgrim Patience, who is dressed humbly “in pilgrymes clothes” (29). Langland makes it clear that Conscience’s behaviour is a model of decorum: he “curteisliche” (31) invites the poor hermit to dinner as well and seats him at a side table together with Will; after having the most distinguished guest, the Doctor, seated and provided with delicacies, he again in the manner of a hospitable host “ful curteisly” (46) asks Scripture to serve bread to the other guests; when he orders more food to be brought to Patience it is said “pryveliche” (55); emphasizing his identity as a member of the aristocracy, Conscience fulfils his obligations as a host not only by providing enough food, but by conducting a cordial conversation, entertaining the guests and saying “murye tales” (57). Despite all the above, Conscience’s placing Will and Patience at the side table might be regarded as implying that he at this point does not pay enough attention to Patience, but I argue that in order for the allegory to work, such an arrangement is necessary. In this episode, both Will and Conscience make crucial choices: Will, as mentioned earlier, must choose to stop academic learning and start moral pursuits, and Conscience, likewise, is to choose between the extravagant courtly life that is exemplified by the high table/the Doctor and the life of penance and passivity symbolized by Patience and the meagre food at the side table.

Yet Conscience’s hospitality is not restricted to Will or Patience alone. He shows equal courtesy to the gluttonous Doctor. As the host, he has the duty to keep order at the dinner, so when Will asks the Doctor what Dowel is, Conscience “ful curteisly a contenaunce . . . made” (13.112) and asks the Doctor the same question humbly by twice addressing “Sire doctour, and it be

youre wille" (13.114).[51] Such "a polite, but searching interrogation of his guests" (Simpson 147) is exactly what the reader would expect from him if he were a knight, which seems all the more natural considering his aristocratic background and his communication with Patience. While later before Conscience identifies with Patience and the pair take leave, the Doctor denigrates Patience's view that love conquers all as "a dido. . . a disours tale" (13.173), the host still says farewell to the group "curteisliche" (13.180). Such a response is well expected because of the requirements of both secular courtesy and the virtue of patience, "since [Patience advocates] a non-confrontational, non-combative approach to personal relations, insisting that you win by losing, that you beat your opponents by not fighting back, Conscience cannot treat Clergy and the friar as losers" (Lawler 94). Acknowledging Will's dual nature as a real person and the personification of *voluntas*, Burrow suggests that "for a model response to the provocation that the friar represents, one must combine Will with Patience, and include their host Conscience. For Conscience is the faculty and patience the virtue which may control and direct impetuous human reactions in such a case" (*Langland's Fictions* 49). I would argue that this line of reasoning also applies to Conscience. It is true that as a psychological faculty Conscience is part of the human will, yet as I have discussed in the previous section, he is also a concrete character, and therefore his reactions in this section exemplify how the virtue of patience influences the practical moral choice of an individual by restraining rash responses.

When elaborating on the power of love in resolving enmities between individuals and groups, and on Dobest as loving one's enemies, the imagery

[51] It is worth noting that Conscience's address to Clergy is less formal, "Now thow, Clergie . . . carpe us what is Dowel" (13.119), showing a higher degree of familiarity between the two and foreshadowing their later agreement to reunite.

Patience uses, quoting his lover Love, is intriguing:

> “With wordes and with werkes,” quod she, “and wil of thyn herte
> Thow love leelly thi soule al thi lif tyme.
> And so thow lere the to lovye, for the Lordes love of hevene,
> Thyn enemy in alle wise eveneforth with thiselve.
> Cast coles on his heed of alle kynde speche;
> Bothe with werkes and with wordes fonde his love to wynne,
> And leye on him thus with love til he laughe on the;
> And but he bowe for this betyng, blynd mote he worthe!”
> (“With words and with works,” she said, “and your heart’s desire
> You love faithfully your soul all your lifetime.
> And so you must learn to love, for the love of the Lord in heaven,
> Your enemy in every way equally
> Cast coals on his head with all kind speech;
> Try to win his love with both words and works,
> And belabours on him thus with love until he laughs on you
> And unless he submits to this beating, let him be blind!”) (13.141-48)[52]

One should love one’s enemies as one’s own soul, Patience argues, but the examples he provides, when taken out of this context, can also be aptly used in speaking about violent revenge. As in the Bible (Proverbs 25:22), the coals cast on the enemy’s head turn out to be kind speech, and it is love that is to be won by deeds and speeches. The true meaning of these words is exactly the opposite of their literal sense. The Doctor, however, fails to comprehend the spiritual force of this rhetorical device and dismisses the idea of the paradoxical power of suffering (Simpson 149). Yet at the end of

[52] In the C-text these lines, in a much abbreviated version, are said by Piers instead of Love, but the message of loving one’s enemies patiently with God’s help is retained.

Patience's exhortation, he reluctantly answers the question of what if all these efforts to win love should fail. If the enemy is not softened and smiles back, Patience says, let him be blinded (presumably by the workings of some divine agent). Thus Patience is not arguing for weakness here, but he admits good will does not always work. However, the solution he offers to this dilemma is not something that can be easily practised, and he seems to be once again evoking supernatural aid in solving problems in the real world, just as Piers has done in the half-acre scene and Conscience will do in Passus XX. On the other hand, although the Doctor's cynicism is rejected, his words do contain a bitter truth, when he refutes Patience's praise of the overwhelming power of love, saying:

> Al the wit of this world and wight mennes strengthe
> Kan noght [par]formen a pees bitwene the Pope and hise enemys,
> Ne bitwene two Cristene kynges kan no wight pees make
> Profitable to either peple . . .
> (All the wisdom of this world and energetic men's strength
> Cannot establish a peace between the Pope and his enemies,
> Nor between two Christian kings can nobody make a peace
> Profitable to both peoples . . .) (13.174-77)

I suggest that certain inferences can be drawn from the fact that Langland makes the Doctor say "Cristene kynges." In the poem the poet's focus is mainly on the Christian community itself, with the conversion of Muslims and Jews being only a prophecy and not expected to take place before proper transformation has taken place in the Christian world in the distant future. Instead, the Pope and Christian kings, leaders in both spiritual and secular matters, are supposed to have the highest degree of authority and nobility, but even they cannot follow Love's edicts and bring peace to the world. However, the Christian leaders' failure should not be seen as inevitable

because they do not seek aid from love yet, and by emphasising the failure of "wit" and "strengthe," two tangible forces in bringing about peace, the Doctor is presented as unable to understand the conquering power of love. And likewise, even Clergy, with whom Conscience establishes mutual understanding in the end, fails to see the truth contained in Patience's words and, calling Conscience "coveitous nouthe / After yeresyeves or yiftes (covetous now / of New Year's gifts or gifts in payment)" (13.184-5),[53] sarcastically disparages Conscience's religious journey in the capacity of a spiritual minstrel as one which is conducted for material gains following the practice of ordinary wandering minstrels (Lawler 94). On the other hand, as no practical advice on loving one's enemies is given, the power of love, strong as it is, is difficult to exert. In terms of secular rulers, Conscience's patience in the dinner scene might be reminiscent of the *Vita* King's gentle treatment of Meed at first, but my suggestion is that they are fundamentally different. As Schroeder suggests, "The only time [Langland] even approaches the style of the courtly romances is in the Lady Meed episodes" (22) with the *descriptio* of her as the only example. While I do not totally agree with the author on the second point and would rather suppose that the lists of the delicate cuisines the Doctor rapaciously devours are distant echoes of that genre, I share her view that the Meed episodes contain explicit elements of the courtly life. Therefore, in treating Meed too kindly, the King places the demands of the secular court before his higher kingly obligations of maintaining order and justice. Conscience the dinner host, who from the very beginning is closely knit with Patience, has the vision and insight the King lacks, who is still unable to see the danger of Meed after Conscience's attempt at persuasion.[54] He is

[53] These lines are absent from the C-text.

[54] On the other hand, Schroeder points out that the word "conscience" can mean "'conscientious observance or practise.' This is the meaning . . . especially applicable to

able to see the virtue of Patience dressed as a poor pilgrim while the *Vita* King's gentleness is best seen as belonging to worldly formalities that should be discarded.

Taking into view the narrative model in penitential romances, that Conscience should leave with Patience on a pilgrimage may come as no surprise to the reader. When we recall his earlier misconduct in life (love of material gain, etc.), it is reasonable that Conscience should make up for those transgressions by a pilgrimage renouncing material matters. Distinctions, however, must be made between "pilgrimage of place" as defined by Dyas,[55] and the spiritual pilgrimage Conscience undertakes. Such distinctions are already foreshadowed in Vision II, with the Palmer's pilgrimage contrasted with the one Piers advocates. This first type of pilgrimage was criticized in Langland's time by both orthodox Christianity and Lollard thought alike as having physical and spiritual dangers, "a dangerous relapse into wandering from the stability of calling and service required not only of religious but also of those who served the wider community" (Dyas 142). Nevertheless, pilgrimage was still a normal way of doing penance with salvation as its final aim despite all the criticism it received. As can be clearly seen from Langland's critique of pilgrimage in the Prologue and the first vision, he does not believe in pilgrimages of place as a proper form of penance. Thus, the pilgrimage Conscience conducts, like that proposed by Reason, is "anything but [an]

knights of courtly romance, models of courtesy and gentle practise," and she also suggests that in the poem "aristocratic or courtly motifs are used almost always for ironic purposes" (18).

[55] Dyas see three strands within the idea of life as pilgrimage: interior pilgrimage, or the *vita contemplativa*; moral pilgrimage, or *vita activa*, which involves obeying God in daily life; place pilgrimage, "which includes journeying to saints' shrines or other holy places to secure forgiveness for specific sins or more general indulgences, to seek healing and other material benefits, to learn and to express devotion"(6). For instances of place pilgrimages in *Piers Plowman*, see Reason's speech to the pilgrims who "seke Seynt James and seyntes of Rome" (5.56). See also the palmer who has travelled to Sinai, Bethlehem, Babylon, Armenia, Alexandria, and many other places (5.526-28).

actual pilgrimage" (Burrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision" 253). Such a distinction is helpful in our understanding of the nature of Conscience's pilgrimage. Burrow identifies in the second vision a "sermon-pilgrimage-penance-pardon sequence," which is both familiar and dramatic, and can involve a great number of people ("The Action of Langland's Second Vision" 249). This sequence might shed some light upon the structure of Passus XIII, with Patience's lectures followed by a pilgrimage, and in this passus it is Haukyn the Active Man who does penance and the pardon remains out of sight. Similar to the way Langland transforms the whole narrative pattern of penitential romances, "The [second] vision does not give a straight, literal account of a collective quest for salvation . . . The reader must know the original sequence, obviously; but most of the interest lies in [how] it is transformed" (Burrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision" 250). Likewise, the pilgrimage in Passus XIII is also transformed: there is little mention of any physical location, with the one instance being "unkyndenesse and coveitise" (13.220), which must be seen as abstract nouns denoting spiritual threats rather than real place names. The circumstances of their encounter with Haukyn are also presented in the briefest manner. The text simply says that "Thei mette with a mynstral" (13.222) on their way. The only verb in that single sentence is so deprived of modifications that it seems to have lost any momentum, as if the two travelers are, paradoxically, in a static journey.[56] Their provisions on the road are "Sobretee and symple speche and soothfast bileve" (13.218) and the topic of their conversation is Dowel (13.221). The fact that Conscience walks might carry spiritual implications too.

[56] With respect to spatial movement *Guy of Warwick* might provide an interesting comparison. As Guy's understanding of spiritual matters deepens and his penance becomes increasingly fulfilled, his mobility decreases. In the first section he travels from England to Jerusalem, and in the second he goes to Germany, then he returns to England, and in the end Guy becomes a hermit in a forest, without moving further around. In both stories spirituality is linked with immobility.

As Rouse points out, the very act of a knight's walking, "is a rejection of that most symbolic of chivalric possessions – the horse" (103n28). Therefore the pilgrimage Conscience undertakes is largely a spiritual one and needs not to be considered as contradictory with Langland's criticism of pilgrimages seen elsewhere.

The word *pacience* in Middle English, Simpson notes, "bears much more of its Latin root, *patientia* (meaning 'suffering') than the Modern English word 'patience'" (148),[57] and this word is best understood by reference to Imaginatif's claim that grace only grows out of "patience and poverte" (12.61). So far in the banquet scene itself the reference to suffering is not very evident yet (perhaps Conscience's kind words to the Doctor might be considered as signs of him tolerating the latter's sin). The theme of voluntary suffering and poverty as two main means of imitating Christ is gradually further developed in the passus after Conscience leaves with Patience, until the Dreamer sees Christ the Knight.

[57] In addition, Godden points out that the word is used in Langland's time, "both in French and in English, as a term for the voluntary hardship of the ascetic or anchoretic life" (102).

3.5 Haukyn's Repentance and Anima's Lesson on Imitating Christ

Soon after Conscience sets out on a journey of self-transformation, during which Patience will "have preved [Conscience] and parfit [him] maked" (13.215),[58] their first (and only) encounter is with Haukyn the Active Man. Like Piers Plowman, he provides people with food, but does not get much reward from it. The two professions of Haukyn, waferer and minstrel, are in fact related at various levels of the social scale, and "Even if Haukyn does represent a wide range of occupations, Langland holds the image of Haukyn within the minstrelsy and feasting, or words and food" (Simpson 158). Although Haukyn is a degenerate figure, his speech, as is often the case in the poem for such characters, in fact contains much truth. Blessing does nobody any good if the person blessed refuses to change his ways, Haukyn argues, and rather cynically he states that the only way to make people behave is "payn defaute (lack of bread)" (13.260).[59] While fully aware of the right things to do, he does not put them into action, and both Conscience and Patience immediately notice the stained coat of Christian faith that Haukyn is wearing. In fact Haukyn "Yhabited as an heremyte, an ordre by hymselve" (13.285),[60] is a hermit, but a hermit that in every sense is contradictory to the one Conscience will become. By examining his garment, Patience shows that Haukyn commits all kinds of sins, but the most damning of them all is his unwillingness to repent, exactly what he has himself criticized earlier.[61] When discussing the causes of sloth in Haukyn, Langland argues that it is the unwillingness to do penance that forms the root of such causes, and in particular a sinner hates "Penaunce and povere men and the passion of

[58] In the C-text this line is said by Conscience himself instead of Clergy. Also, there Conscience is setting out to find perfection (presumably in Christ) (C.15.185) rather than making himself perfect.
[59] Note the reference to Piers Plowman's invocation of Hunger in the half-acre episode.
[60] This reference is absent in the C-text.
[61] Compare Gawain's refusal to do penance in the *Sankgreal*.

seintes" (13.419), but poverty and patient suffering are in fact the main ways of doing penance and imitating Christ in the poem, as will be discussed soon. Langland also has a special warning for "Clerkes and knyghtes" (clergy and knights) (13.437). They welcome the king's minstrels at royal feasts, but they have become too involved in worldly affairs while in fact they should welcome beggars instead, who are "Goddes minstrales" (13.440). While Langland here is not actually advocating voluntary poverty yet, he does encourage better treatment of the poor, the first of the three categories of minstrels he recommends. While the last category are the disabled and are similar to the first in being disadvantaged groups in society, the second are clerics who remind them of Christ's Passion (13.445-47). The two key methods of imitating Christ, poverty and patient suffering, are already foreshadowed early in the examination of Haukyn.

Conscience "in a curteis manere" (13.459) asks why Haukyn has not done penance for his sins.[62] Surprisingly, it is Conscience who teaches Haukyn the three steps of contrition: *Cordis contricio*, *Oris confessio*, *Satisfaccio*, corresponding to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest respectively (14.16-22). If Haukyn follows his advice, the physical food that he used to work for can be replaced by the spiritual food Patience provides and he will not need to worry too much about his bodily needs (14.29-34).[63] Haukyn seems to be a little persuaded and asks where Charity can be found. In reply, Patience starts a lengthy praise of poverty, in which he argues that poverty

[62] This conversation between Conscience and Haukyn, including the latter's self-justification, is absent in the C-text.

[63] At one point Patience's message can even be said to have become a bit too radical: If Haukyn lives by the spiritual food of "*Fiat voluntas tua*" (14.49), he will not need to worry about death. He even proposes a rather extreme form of renouncing the world: if one lives by God's teaching, the shorter his life the better (14.59). Compare the similar exhortation St. Bernard makes to the crusaders.

provides resistance against all seven deadly sins and has nine gifts.[64] Even "richesse rightfulliche wonne and resonably yspended" (14.102), while it is not evil by itself, is inferior to poverty. Godden argues that "At the heart of the Haukyn episode is a rejection of the values associated with the Active Life in the Langlandian sense of honest toil, in favour of those associated with 'pouerte', in the Langlandian sense of an eremitic life of voluntary hardship" (148–49), although the harsh tone on wealth is softened in Will's subsequent encounter with Anima. Finally, Haukyn regrets that "he hadde lond or lordshipe, lasse other moore, / Or maistrie over any man mo than of hymselve" (14.327-8), renouncing power and wealth (a statement more applicable to members of higher classes such as knights). Weeping bitterly, he finally becomes fully repentant.[65]

The case of Haukyn might be seen as what Conscience would have gone through had he not been transformed, and the whole scene would make up for the moment of moral awakening that so far has been inconveniently missing from the poem if Conscience were to be seen as a penitential knight. Quite a few details would suggest that Haukyn could be regarded as corresponding to Conscience/Patience, now that the two are closely knit and difficult to distinguish. Haukyn is a minstrel, while Patience says the poor, to which group he obviously belongs, are "Goddes minstrales" (13.440). And the minstrel imagery extends further than these two passus, for as Simpson proposes, Patience "is the model of the ideal minstrel described at different points in the poem" (156). Special emphasis is laid on voluntary poverty, with Haukyn's main problem being his greed for money: "Moore to good than to

[64] It is worth noting that in explaining the first gift, that poverty is spiritual health to the body, "contricion is confortable thyng, conscience woot wel, / And a sorwe of hymself, and a solace to the soule" (14.282-23). Conscience, either a psychological faculty or a fictional character, already attests to the value of contrition.

[65] Haukyn's moral awakening is absent in the C-text.

God the gome his love caste" (13.357), which is reminiscent of the corruptive power of Lady Meed, and her accusations against Conscience. Another minor similarity is that Haukyn makes a living by selling wafers, and Conscience has also provided food in the dinner episode. Interestingly, another food provider in the poem is Piers Plowman/Christ. It is also curious to note that after Conscience notices Haukyn's filthy garment, he remains silent except for a brief sketch of the three steps of penance, so the lengthy lectures by Patience may have been meant for both Conscience and Haukyn.

While Christ does not show up until much later in the poem, the quest for him begins right after Haukyn repents for his sins. In the interim, the Dreamer meets several spiritual teachers who show him different aspects of the imitation of Christ. In Passus XV, after a long gap from his vision of Haukyn, Will is still looking for the meaning of Dowel. Showing no respect to wealthy and powerful people "Lordes or ladies or any lif ellis-- / As persons in pelure with pendaunts of silver" (15.6-7), he is widely regarded as a mad man.[66] When the Dreamer finally falls asleep because of Reason's pity, he meets the strange creature Anima. Anima, well-known in Christ's court, has multiple names, including Conscience. Quoting Isidore, Anima tells Will that the function of the soul by which the latter "chalange or chalange noght, chepe or refuse" is Conscience, "Goddes clerk and his notarie" (15.31-2).[67] In a continuation of the theme of the futility of academic learning, Anima calls the dreamer "oon of Prides knyghtes" (15.50), and the latter's desire for knowledge is rebuked for wishing to know the reasons why Anima has all the names he has listed. It is excessive craving for knowledge that has tempted

[66] This instance of the Dreamer waking up is absent in the C-text, where Conscience and Patience directly move from Haukyn to Anima, who is first referred to as Haukyn's leader, *Liberum Arbitrium* (C.16.156).

[67] Here Conscience should in general be understood as a psychological faculty, but this passage may also imply that Conscience the knight has the potential to gain spiritual wisdom as Anima does.

Lucifer to fall, Anima says, and it is against nature and reason that “any creature sholde konne al, except Crist oone” (15.53).[68] Even Haukyn the sinner knows that hearing good things without practicing them can only bring harm. It gives people moral license so that they feel they have done enough. Since excessive enquiries are signs of intellectual pride and lead only to sin, Anima suggests that the topics to be preached to the common people should be easy to understand, such as the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. The priests of his day, however, instead of setting good examples for the religious community, succumb to wealth and power “for lordes ye plesen, / And reverencen the riche the rather for hir silver” (15.80-1), making them inappropriate examples to imitate. Clerics should practice what they preach so that the lay people would “amenden hem that thei mysdoon, moore for youre ensaumples / Than for to prechen and to preven it noght” (15.109-10). Unfortunately it is not the case, and corruption, instead of goodness, now has its root in the Church itself. Sir John and Sir Geoffrey, two degenerate clerics, carry “a girdel of silver, / A baselard or a ballok-knyf with botons overgilte” (15.123-4),[69] objects that it is inappropriate for the clergy to have. With all being said, Langland concludes with a bitter argument on the mutability of worldly wealth. Even the clerics cannot keep their money forever. After they die their wealth is soon grabbed by profligates, who, instead of showing gratitude, call the former misers. Wealth, as it turns out, does no one any good.

However, there is hope for anyone who has done good deeds–Charity remembers them. Asked by Will of the meaning of Charity, Anima defines it as “A childissh thyng . . . Withouten fauntelte or folie a fre liberal wille”

[68] This line could either mean that such knowledge is forbidden to all but Christ, or that the only knowledge worth having is that about Christ.
[69] This attack against the Church is absent in the C-text.

(15.149-50). The elusiveness of Christ/Charity is a recurrent theme in the poem, and Will claims that he has never seen true charity (nor has Haukyn), and even the people who are kind to the poor and willing to lend money cling to wealth nonetheless. Likewise, contrary to clerics' teachings, Will argues that he has never seen the omnipresence of Christ. The Dreamer does see his potential to imitate Christ though, but this potential cannot be fully realized in this world, because he "seigh hym nevere soothly but as myself in a mirour: *Hic in enigmate, tunc facie ad faciem*" (15.162). Charity is like Christ, the Dreamer concludes, and neither is found in "chaumpions fight, ne chaffare (champions' fight, nor goods)" (15.164),[70] two symbols of power and wealth. Anima then proceeds to lecture on their nature. Charity is

> As proud of a peny as of a pound of golde,
> And is as glad of a gowne of a gray russet
> As of a tunycle of Tarse or of trie scarlet.
> He is glad with alle glade and good til alle wikkede,
> And leneth and loveth alle that Oure Lord made.
> Corseth he no creature, ne he kan bere no wrathe,
> Ne no likynge hath to lye ne laughe men to scorne.
> Al that men seyn, he leet it sooth, and in solace taketh,
> And alle manere meschiefs in myldenesse he suffreth.
> Coveiteth he noon erthely good but heveneriche blisse.
> (As proud of a penny as of a pound of gold,
> And is as glad of a gray rustic gown
> As of a jacket of silk or of choice scarlet.
> He is glad with all who are glad and good to all who are wicked,

[70] A line absent in the C-text. In Passus X, Lady Scipture also says that kingship and knighthood never got any man nearer heaven, and wealth and power never have (332-4).

And generous and loving to all that our Lord made.
He curses no creature, nor can he feel anger,
He has no liking to lie or to laugh at or scorn men.
All that men say, he considers it true, and takes in content,
And all manner of misfortunes he suffers with patience.
He covets no earthly good but heavenly bliss.) (15.166-75)

In these lines Charity is an emblem of humility and patience. However, his attitude towards worldly wealth is more indifference than complete renunciation despite the conventional reference to his preference of heavenly bliss to earthly good. His passivity and trustfulness towards others even border on weakness and naïvety, and as the reader has been and will be told, Peace or courtesy alone cannot solve problems of this world but often only condone forces of evil. While justice must be tempered by mercy considering mankind's sinful nature, mercy must also be strengthened by justice exactly for the same reason. Rather than relying on money or wealthy friends, Charity has two divine agents to carry out his will "*Fiat-voluntas-tua*" and "*Spera in Deo*" (15.179-80). When he visits poor men and prisoners, it is not physical bread, but "swetter liflode" that he brings to them (15.184).[71] What is of greater significance is the focus on self-examination and penance symbolized by working in a laundry:

And whan he is wery of that werk than wole he som tyme
Labouren in a lavendrye wel the lengthe of a mile,
And yerne into youthe, and yepeliche seche
Pride, with al the appurtenaunce, and pakken hem togideres,
And bouken hem at his brest and beten hem clene,
And leggen on longe with *Laboravi in gemitu meo*,

[71] Jesus is a provider of both physical and spiritual food.

And with warm water at hise eighen wasshen hem after.
Thanne he syngeth whan he doth so, and som tyme seith wepynge,
Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies.
(And when he is weary of that work then he sometimes
Labours in a laundry for about twenty minutes[72]
And turns his thoughts to his youth, and eagerly seeks out
Pride, with all its appurtenances and packs them together
And cleanses them with lye at his chest and beats them clean
And labours for a long time with *I have laboured in my groanings*
And with warm water he washes them at his eyes afterwards
Then he sings when he does so, and sometimes weeping, he says,
A heart contrite and humble, God, you will not despise.) (15.186-94)

The metaphor of carrying out penance as doing laundry, which has been used in describing Haukyn's sordid coat, is repeated here. It takes far more than an oral acknowledgement of one's sins to carry out penance – genuine remorse and mortification of the flesh are both required. However, to see Charity face-to-face, human efforts are not enough and the Dreamer must seek the help of Piers Plowman, who, unlike priests who only see people's words and actions, is capable of examining their deepest thoughts. The crux of the difficulty of imitating Christ is made clear that only a divine agent is able to see through those who are in fact pretending. As Haukyn himself has claimed, people may well display signs of imitating Christ without actually doing so: Haughty men might speak patiently to nobles but not so to the poor (15.202-4). Beggars who "[loken] as lambren and semen lif-holy" (15.206) might do this in order to "have hir mete on swich an esy manere / Than for

[72] It takes about twenty minutes to walk a mile.

penaunce and parfitnesse, the poverte that swiche taketh" (15.207-8).[73] The appearances of humility and poverty are not necessarily indications of sanctity, but they can be used to serve contrary purposes. Whether someone is imitating Christ is only known to himself or Piers Plowman, who in this case is identified with Christ. The joust between Christ and Death is clearly foreshadowed when Anima compares Charity as "Goddes champion" (15.216). As valiant a knight as Charity is, he is also "the murieste of mouth at mete where he sitteth" (15.217), which is reminiscent of Conscience's patience in the banquet he hosts.

Anima's attitude then seems to have taken quite a sharp turn when he claims that Charity is not entirely irreconcilable with wealth. Anima has seen Charity "in silk and som tyme in russet, / Bothe in grey, and in grys, and in gilt harneis (in silk and sometimes in coarse cloth, / both in rough grey wool, and in fur, and in gilded armour)" (15.220-1). Not only is Charity compatible with ordinary rich clothing, but in particular he can be found in richly decorated knightly equipment. Despite the corruptive power of wealth aforementioned and the emphasis placed on remorse and penitence, Anima adds that Charity is always cheerful and as long as people are willing to give their riches to those in need, wealth *per se* is not a problem. His argument is further supported by the examples of St. Edmund and Edward the Confessor. Both of them were kings, but they were still revered as saints because of their charity. It is somewhat puzzling to see Anima's sudden turn from his previous harsh criticism of the corruptive power of secular riches, for it now seems that to imitate Christ and see Charity, one does not necessarily have to renounce wealth, and moderation rather than pauperism is advocated. Charity is seen "Riden, and rennen in raggede wedes" (15.226), another foreshadowing of

[73] These lines, perhaps an attack against the friars, are absent in the C-text.

the joust between Christ and Death, but he is never like a beggar (15.227).[74] Most of the time "in riche robes rathest he walketh" (15.228), and "Riche men he recomendeth, and of hir robes taketh / That withouten wiles ledeth hir lyves" (15.233-4). Charity likes virtuous rich people, and he is even willing to visit the king's court if there are honest councillors.[75] In making this less radical claim about wealth, as Bloomfield explains, the poet adopts a point made by the monk of Bury St. Edmunds, who argues that someone who does not have minimum needs is inevitably compelled to use other means that often lead to vices, and therefore poverty "entails a man's having sufficient to live on obtained by labor with the hands" (148). On the contrary, the Church seems to be a more corrupted place as it is difficult to find charity there.[76] The clerics manipulate rites of marriage, a sacred bond that "conscience and Crist hath yknyt faste" (15.242), in order to gain wealth.[77] To make matters worse, not only do the clergy hoard riches, the bishops break their oaths in begetting children. Here no knightly quality of conscience is mentioned and the noun, without any further context, quite likely only refers to an abstract psychological faculty, but if he is read as a character at all, this line shows a close relationship between him and Christ.[78] It used to be the case that the clergy were pure so that they had a close relationship with Charity/Christ, but unfortunately now corruption has taken hold. Anima, however, blames nobody

[74] Bloomfield reads this line as "an aspersion on the friars" (122), which curiously is retained in the C-text. Taking Langland's softer tone on wealth in the context, I suggest that it is possible that the poet here acknowledges the necessity of wealth, and sees that a total lack of means of livelihood cannot support acts of charity.
[75] Compare the king's court in the Meed episode.
[76] Similarly, it has been mentioned that Charity was only found among friars during St. Francis's time (15.230-32).
[77] This reference is absent in the C-text.
[78] The boundaries between Conscience the knight and conscience the psychological faculty are somewhat blurred in certain cases. And if we take into consideration Conscience's role in the Unity episode where he acts like the Pope in guarding the Church entrusted to him by Christ, saying that marriage is ordained by conscience and Christ gains a new layer of meaning.

for this fallen state of things but only wishes God to cause a miraculous reformation so that everyone will follow Charity (15.249-50). Being always peaceful, Charity does not condemn or blame others, and “The mooste liflode that he lyveth by is love in Goddes passion” (15.255). All Christians, Anima concludes, should preserve mildness and keep in mind that “theigh thei suffrede al this, God suffrede for us moore (in this context it is actually Christ that Amina is referring to) / In ensample we sholde do so, and take no vengeaunce / Of oure foes that dooth us falsnesse” (15.260-2). Every Christian must imitate Christ in his patient suffering and not seek vengeance, a message once again highlighted. In fact, Christ’s Crucifixion, along with the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, took place according to God’s plan, because otherwise they could not have happened: “he suffre in ensample that we sholde suffren also, / And seide to swiche that suffre wolde that *Pacientes vincunt*” (15.266-7). The argument that in the end the patient will conquer has already been proved numerous times by saints’ lives which record their poverty, mortification, pain, hunger, heat, and all other forms of torments. However, it turns out that their success is not replicable by ordinary human beings, because it is by divine intervention alone that these saints have sustenance (in the form of food voluntarily provided by wild animals). In the saints’ examples in order that the patient will actually conquer, everything is dependent on God’s intervention, and there is no place for human agency. Ordinary patient and passive human beings are helpless when they encounter forces of evil, a dilemma most clearly visible in the scene where Peace is mistreated by Wrong, in the half-acre episode and in the final section of Conscience trying to orchestrate the defence of Unity, with patience/peace and practicalities seeming irreconcilable in all the three situations. It should

also be noted that even the saints themselves did not entirely reject the use of wealth because it was a necessity.[79] St. Paul the Apostle weaved baskets and sold them for food, and St. Peter as well as St. Andrew sold some of the fish they caught.[80]

Langland still hopes that the friars will transform themselves and that they and the aristocracy can become good examples for each other. The ferocious beasts were tamed and showed great gentleness to the saints, but while they were more than willing to feed the saints, only birds were chosen as proper divine agents, because creatures of similar natures should feed one another. Kindness breeds kindness, and only if friars set an example by turning down the alms given by the aristocracy, will the noblemen and ladies be moved to give the extolled money back to the poor.[81] Vice versa, the aristocracy should not give wealth to monks who already have enough wealth and endowments, but instead they should donate riches to the friars, who, as redistributors of wealth, "of hem that habbeth thei taken, and yyveth hem that ne habbeth" (15.330). The reality, however, is that "clerkes and knyghtes, and communers that ben riche" (15.331) ironically give to those who already have more,[82] like people who plan to plant trees in a beautiful forest. Instead they should help the poor people who have little, a duty which the religious are more strictly bound to fulfil (15.341-2).

Anima then suggests that all Christians should "conformen hem to charite" (15.343), i.e. model their lives on the love of Christ. The metaphor Langland

[79] It is curious that these examples are used among cases of the saints' renunciation of the world. Compare Conscience's argument of two types of Meed.
[80] The above lines on Christ's Passion and how the patient ones conquer are absent in the C-text.
[81] Compare Piers Plowman's request to the knight in the half-acre episode.
[82] The irony is even stronger when this line is compared with the following famous line in the Bible: "For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound: but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away" (Matthew 25:29).

uses here is worth discussion in comparing hypocrites to false coins[83] (and presumably true believers are genuine ones, although the author only uses half of the metaphor), which is reminiscent of the way two types of Meed are distinguished earlier in the poem. After a long lament of how every trade is not in its original perfect state (farming, sailing, education, etc.), especially the office of priests, Anima remains optimistic that faith will make up for the loss (15.386). Followed by a critique of Saracens, he further claims that English priests, as Mohammed, "a Cristene clerk acorsed in his soule" (15.412), did, led the people astray by succumbing to Covetousness.[84] Every anchorite, hermit, monk and friar in an ideal state are "Peeren to Apostles" (15.417), Anima argues, and the notion of imitation is further underlined that they should do as their founders did, who were manifestations of voluntary poverty. God truly works in mysterious ways, and if the clergy do live holy lives as instructed, God will make sure that the world becomes a perfect place. The sick will be cured, and even conflicts will be resolved by "Hir preieres and hir penaunces" (15.426).

On a side note, the etymology of the word "Hethen" (15.458) is worth a few comments. Langland argues that the word is derived from heath, untilled land. A person, therefore, must be "tilled" by a ploughman before he becomes Christian. The ploughman in this context is easily understood as Christ, but most laypeople are slow to exercise the teachings they receive. Quoting the example from the Gospel of Matthew,[85] Anima argues that some people must

[83] "Lossheborwes sterlynges" (C.17.82).
[84] Mohammad is believed to have tamed a dove which he claimed was sent by God. Likewise, the English priests in Langland's time also fed a dove called Covetousness. Note that in the Bible, the Holy Spirit often appears in the form of a dove.
[85] See Matthew 22: 1-14. Langland argues that the selected few righteous people are directly fed with God's love and righteousness, but most people are like birds which flock when their feeder whistles. The birds, however, are Langland's addition to the scriptural passage.

learn from others' examples before they set on the right path, a task that should be carried out by the clergy: "Right so rude men that litel reson konneth / Loven and bileven by lettred mennes doynges, / And by hire wordes and werkes wenen and trowen" (15.475-7).[86] In addition, the conversion and salvation of Saracens is another task that the clergy should undertake. Since now there are members of the clergy enjoying titles for places belonging to the Saracens, those men should go there and preach Christ's cross. Yet unlike crusading propaganda that often advocates the physical destruction of the infidels should peaceful means fail, Langland's tone is highly pacifist here.[87] Saracens, Scribes and Jews are considered people who have gone astray, and it is easier to convert them by teaching them the mysteries of the Trinity because they all share part of the Christian faith. Optimistic as he has previously been, Anima believes God will allow such things to happen.

In the final sections of this very long passus the theme of the corruptive power of wealth is again highlighted along with the theme of patient suffering. Righteous men in the early days of Christianity, Anima argues, were able to suffer patiently and renounce wealth, who

> . . . defouled hir flessh, forsoke hir owene wille,
> Fer fro kyth and fro kyn yvele yclothed yeden,
> Baddely ybedded, no book but conscience,
> Ne no richesse but the roode to rejoisse hem inne.
> (. . . mortified their flesh, renounced their desires
> And went about poorly dressed far from home
> Slept badly, with no other book but that of conscience
> And with no other riches but the cross to take comfort from.)

[86] Much of the section on the conversion of Muslims is absent in the C-text.
[87] Compare St. Bernard's view that when necessary the use of violence is justified to convert Saracens, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

(15.533-6)

As a consequence, social harmony was maintained between the rich and the poor. The present situation, however, is that the cross on the coin is held in higher regard in the Cross of Christ.[88] It is worth noting that a specific group of knights, the Knights Templar, serve as a warning for those who fell under the spell of wealth.[89] Anima further foretells that one day, material greed will be punished, with the mighty taken down and the humble and meek exalted. In Anima's warning to bishops, "knyghthod and kynde wit, and the commune and conscience" should unite and restore the clergy to its true state divested of worldly possessions, which seems to suggest that knights have the obligation to purge the Church. Anima finally summarizes his lengthy lecture by stating that human beings can never be saved by reason, but by grace, mercy, mortification, suffering and faith. Concluding this long passus, the paradoxical motif of Christ as a patient sufferer/conqueror is foregrounded in a discussion of his death at the hands of Jews (15.595-7). It is to follow his example and convert all non-believers that Christians should aim.

In the following Passus XVI, Will thanks Anima for Haukyn's sake. Will, Haukyn, and Conscience are everyman characters, but Will and Conscience, who are capable of acquiring spiritual wisdom and transforming themselves, are reformed versions of *Vita Activa*. Seeing that the Dreamer remains confused about the true meaning of Charity, Anima then goes on to further explicate its nature, this time using a tree metaphor. The tree of Charity, Anima explains, is called Patience (16.8). Its various parts are passive Christian virtues such as mercy, compassion, and gentle words.[90] Will passes out on hearing that Piers Plowman (Christ) is in charge of the tree, at which

[88] Compare the earlier metaphor comparing hypocrites to fake coins.
[89] Compare Bernard's fervent praise of the "New Knighthood," which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
[90] Langland uses a slightly different set of terms in the C-text.

point he enters another dream within the previous dream, in which Piers explains to him that in order for the tree to stand, all three persons of the Trinity, in the form of three staves placed near the tree, must be invoked to help against the temptation of the World, the Flesh and the Devil.[91] Here Christ is mainly a victorious conqueror. The World and the Flesh are defeated by the power of God and Christ's Passion respectively. However, when the fruit begins to ripe and is about to be destroyed or stolen by the Devil, it is Christ's deputy Free Will, aided by the Holy Spirit, who takes up the third stave to defend the tree. It is by making such choices that mankind are able to avoid sinning.

Will's further enquiries about the nature of the tree are thwarted by Piers the stern teacher, who believes that he has explained it clearly enough. As a consequence Will begins to ask about the nature of the fruit. The metaphor of bearing fruit is reminiscent of human reproduction, but paradoxically the most worthy of them all is the renunciation of the latter. The fruit on the highest branch, as Piers explains, is virginity, "aungeles peeris, and rathest wole be ripe, / And swete withouten swellyng--sour worth it nevere" (16.71-2);[92] the one near the top is Continence;[93] the one on the lowest branch, "a moiste fruyt withalle," is Matrimony (16.68). It is difficult to tell what Langland is implying here, and one suggestion may be that he finds himself compelled to acknowledge the importance of sex for the continuing of the human race after all.[94] In the following scene the Harrowing of Hell is foreshadowed, for when

[91] For the three temptations, see Howard.
[92] In the C-text, Langland further comments on the importance of virginity for knights: "In kynges court and in knyhtes, the clenneste men and fayreste / Shollen serue for þe lord sulue" (18.95-6).
[93] Compare the Grail quest in Malory. All three knights who succeed in it are either virgin or chaste.
[94] Compare Wife of Bath's famous defence of marriage.

Piers shakes down the fruits from the tree at the Dreamer's request,[95] they are taken away by the Devil and stored in Limbo, at which Piers takes up the second staff, Christ's Passion, and hits the Devil (one of the rare cases in the B-text where Piers is seen to act "for pure tene (because of pure anger)" (16.86).[96] In this scene the reader is simultaneously reminded of two events: mankind's fall because of the forbidden fruit and the Harrowing of Hell. Then the dreamer has a vision of the life of Christ, which is generally a recapitulation of Gospel narratives and in many ways identical to the jousting episode in Passus XVIII and XIX. Therefore only a few points will be made here to avoid redundancy. The ownership of the fruit, as the Holy Spirit speaks through the mouth of Gabriel, is decided "bi juggement of armes" (16.95) in a joust that Christ will enter. In this vision, Piers seems to be more than Christ's humanity, but a symbol of the unified divine will in teaching Christ the art of healing both physical and spiritual illnesses.[97] After Christ has cursed Judas who betrayed him, the pace of the narrative accelerates and Langland recapitulates Christ's Passion within a few lines, that Jesus

> . . . on the Friday folwynge for mankynde sake
> Justed in Jerusalem, a joye to us alle.
> On cros upon Calvarie Crist took the bataille

[95] Note that after they have been plucked from the tree, Virginity cries, Widowhood (Continence) weeps, but when Piers lays his hand on Matrimony, it "made a foul noise, / That I hadde ruthe whan Piers rogged, it gradde so rufulliche" (16.77-8). Matrimony seems to face the greatest risks among the three.

[96] Previously Piers tears up the pardon "for pure tene" (7.115), but in that case he does not resort to violence.

[97] Compare Lancelot and Galahad in Malory. In fact, healing is seen as a key Christ-like and saintly power. Burrow interprets this passage, and Christ's wearing Piers's arms, in a different way, arguing that in changing Piers's occupation from a plowman to a knight Langland attacks the core of his meaning. He sees in Piers as an older knight who instructs young novices. The fact that Piers can teach Jesus, a superior being, shows that even God must learn how to be a human with all its conditions and restraints (*Langland's Fictions* 73–74). I would rather interpret Piers's new characteristics as pertaining to a special knighthood.

Ayeins deeth and the devel, destruyed hir botheres myghtes—
Deide, and deeth fordide, and day of nyght made. (16.162-6)[98]

At this point Will wakes up.

[98] This seemingly redundant reference to Christ's Passion is absent from the C-text.

3.6 Will's Encounter with Faith and Hope prior to Christ's Joust

Alas, but Christ is nowhere to be found, until one Sunday Will meets Abraham/Faith, "an heraud of armes" (16.177) who mentions that he is looking for a "ful bold bacheler" (16.179).[99] The Old Testament character also "heralds" the New Testament Jesus. The young knight is recognizable by his coat of arms, which is "Thre leodes in oon lyth" (16.181),[100] and it is added that likewise, a human being's life has three states, wedlock, widowhood and virginity,[101] forming yet another triad. While it is a bit difficult to track Langland's logic here,[102] it might suffice to say that the life of a human being resembles that of the godhead, making imitation possible.

After Abraham recounts his covenant with God, he shows to the Dreamer the unsaved souls in his bosom.[103] The story of Christ saving mankind by paying the Devil a ransom (which is later intertwined with the story of Christ undertaking a joust against Death, in which the tradition of Christ as a lover-knight is alluded to) is told, after which the dreamer sees another seeker

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[99] Note that in the C-text, Faith is identified with Christ rather than Abraham (16.185). Also, in the joust between Longinus and Christ, the former is referred to a "blynde bacheler" (18.85)

[100] Note that in the jousting scene Christ wears human nature so that he will not be recognized. Understandably, the Devil cannot understand the sacrifice and charity Christ represents.

[101] Note that this division is slightly different from the pattern we observe in Anima's explication of the fruits in the Tree of Charity, which consists of virginity, continence, and marriage, although when later the tree is shaken by Piers, the fruits of widowhood are seen to drop instead of Continence as well.

[102] His use of symbolism takes a few shifts in these lines. At first the three persons symbolize God's power, medium to use that power (probably referring to Christ), and his willingness to suffer (in this case the Holy Ghost). Then the three components in the first human marriage, Adam, Eve, and their children are symbols of the Trinity "each the delight of the other, yet having one, single nature." It is not clear whether Langland intends Eve or their descendants as a parallel to Christ in the divine Trinity. Then instead of viewing marriage as consisting of a trinity, Langland regards marriage, widowhood and virginity as corresponding to the Trinity, with widowhood being a symbol of Christ. In other medieval contexts Christ is often seen as a bridegroom (the lover-knight is a related concept). Virginity seems to have no place in these metaphors, but Christ is a virgin. In conclusion, every element of marriage can be found in Christ.

[103] For Abraham's bosom, and its place in the history of the ideal of Purgatory, see Le Goff.

of Christ. Hope/Moses, referring to himself as a scout, is also looking for Christ the Knight (17.1). In the parchment he carries, there are only two short precepts: love God and love one's neighbour. Then the Dreamer expresses his confusion as to which one he should trust: since Abraham's teaching has saved more people than he can count, he does not understand why there should be another law, especially when that law tells us to love all,[104] which is something the simple-minded dreamer fails to comprehend, because it is already difficult enough to believe Abraham who does not require one to love one's enemies:

> It is ful hard for any man on Abraham bileve,
> And wel awey worse yit for to love a sherewe.
> It is lighter to leeve in thre lovely persones
> Than for to lovye and lene as wel lorels as lele.
> (It is very hard for any man to believe Abraham,
> And much worse still to love an evil person.
> It is easier to love three loveable persons
> Than to love and give to wastrels as well as honest people.) (17.42-5)

The dreamer has already dismissed Hope because he believes that the expectations as the latter sets out in his law are too high for any human being, and whoever manages to practise them if at all, cannot do it for long. At this crucial point, the three characters meet a Samaritan. At their meeting place they see a man hurt by thieves. Faith and Hope, despite their teachings, fail to practice what they teach. It is the Samaritan, however, who tends to his wounds and sends him to *Lex Christi*, the law of Christ. Abraham, Moses and the Samaritan also represent the three successive ages of law: natural law,

[104] Note that "to love your neighbours" does not necessarily translate into loving all.

the Old Law and the New Law, with the last one ushered in by Christ (Burrow, *Langland's Fictions* 56). Will, following the Samaritan, whom the narrator has identified with the person Abraham has been looking for, is informed that Christ is on equal terms with mankind (otherwise he would be inimitable): "'Ac thi frend and thi felawe,'" quod he, 'thow fyndest me at nede'" (17.87).

Then Christ, instead of accusing them of hypocrisy, shows an understanding of human weakness, and he explains that Faith and Hope, had they been willing to help, would not have been of much use, with the only cure being the blood of a virgin's child. The healing is not complete until the child is eaten and his blood all drunk, a rather gruesome metaphor.[105] Christ further remarks that only those who "suwen oure werkes" (17.102),[106] i.e. imitators of Christ, can safely pass through the perils of this world,[107] and further that a man on horseback (a characteristic pertaining to knighthood) is bolder and more likely to thwart forces of evil. It might feel strange to note that when the Samaritan speaks of Christ who has already been born and who is about to joust with Death, he seems to be referring to somebody else. According to the Samaritan's explication, the contrast between Abraham's teaching that God has three persons and Moses' that one God should be loved above all is perfectly reconcilable.[108] First he explains the unity of the three persons in the Trinity using the metaphor of a fist, fingers, and a palm. To elucidate the relationship between loving God and loving others by the metaphor of a torch, the Samaritan explains that like a hot coal melts wax, "[the] grace of the Holy

[105] Compare Galahad's sister who gives her life to cure a sick noblewoman. James Simpson observes in this language, which defamiliarizes ideas of the Eucharist, baptism, and penance, an evocation of "a strange, even barbaric rite of the kind found in romances of the period" (198).
[106] This phrase is absent from the C-text.
[107] Here Christ refers himself as following Faith and Hope, contrasting the previous scene in which he is the person being followed.
[108] It is worth noticing that here Conscience is identical with "kynde wit" who, like heretics, might speak against the Christian faith because they do not understand it (17.136-37).

Goost the greet myght of the Trinite / Melteth to mercy—to merciable and to noon othere" (17.230-31),[109] but mercy cannot be softened without Christ's aid: "So wole Crist of his curteisie, and men crye hym mercy, / Bothe foryyve and foryete, and yit bidde for us / To the Fader of hevene foryifnesse to have" (17.242-44).[110] Langland does not forget the theme of renouncing wealth in suggesting that rich people remember Dives as an example so that they will give back their wealth to God. Langland further delves into the matter of doing penance, where he discusses the issue in a very technical manner instead of rather general arguments previously seen. Supposing that he has sinned, but he has confessed and begged for God's mercy, Will asks, will he still be saved? The Samaritan confirms, yet adding that repentance at the point of death will not work, not because of God's inability to forgive, but the fault is entirely on the human side: when people are about to die the fear of despair will be too strong. While restitution is needed to turn justice to pity, in case no restitution can be paid, sorrow alone would be enough. Finally the Samaritan ends his lecture with a humane discussion of three causes of sin: the flesh, sicknesses, and unkindness.[111] Langland further acknowledges the difficulties in avoid sinning. Failing to combat the lures of the flesh or patiently withstand the torments of illness, he says, are not ideal but will not be judged harshly, because they simply stem from human frailty. Nothing can divest one of the ability to love, however, and unkindness is not tolerated by God.

The Samaritan departs before Will wakes up again and

> Wolleward and weetshoed wente I forth after
> As a recchelees renk that of no wo reccheth,

[109] Note that hot coal has been previously used as a metaphor for kindness.
[110] The Samaritan later argues that "For every manere good man may be likned to a torche, / Or ellis to a tapur, to reverence the Trinite" (17.278-79).
[111] Compare the three causes in the Tree of Charity episode: the flesh, the Devil, and the world.

And yede forth lik a lorel al my lif tyme,

Til I weex wery of the world and wilned eft to slepe.[112]

(Shirtless and shoeless went forth

As a reckless man that cares for no woe

And went forth like a wastrel all my lifetime

Till I grew weary of the world and desired again to sleep.) (18.1-4)

In seeking Christ, the Dreamer is already imitating him through the two main approaches discussed in the poem: patient endurance (by not caring about his suffering and growing weary of the world) and renouncing the world's material wealth (by wandering about with neither clothes nor shoes). Then the poem reaches its climax, when Will sees Christ the Knight's joust at Jerusalem.[113]

[112] Compare Conscience's behaviour at the end of the poem.
[113] Bloomfield, however, sees the last two passus as the true climax (127).

3.7 Failed Guardian of Unity and Fallible Knights in Imitating Christ

Although Will has twice seen Christ's Passion (he witnesses the scene only once in the C-text. Perhaps Langland in his revision of the poem decides to remove the first redundant and rather sketchy account), in Passus XIX, when he falls asleep during a mass, he is still confused about the relationship between Piers and Christ. At this time, it is Conscience, whom we have not seen for a long time, that answers him. Conscience's answer is briefly summarized as follows: Truly it is the shape of Piers stained with blood that Will sees, he says, but it is only a sign of Christ's humanity and the Dreamer should see through it. In Conscience's subsequent clarification of the differences between the names Jesus and Christ, interestingly he uses an analogy of the triad of knight, king, and conqueror.[114] Kings make knights and are therefore more honourable than the latter, but to become a conqueror one must have both "hardynesse of herte and of hendenesse (courage and courtesy)" (19.31), combining mercy and justice. Because Jesus has overcome death and hell, and has domain over human souls, he should be seen as a conqueror, which is the meaning of Christ.[115] To imitate Christ, one must always keep the cross in mind because Christ sacrificed himself to teach human beings a lesson that

> . . . whan we ben tempted,
> Therwith to fighte and fenden us fro fallynge into synne,
> And se bi his sorwe that whoso loveth joye,
> To penaunce and to poverte he moste puten hymselven,

[114] Compare Pizan's views in her *Book of the Body Politic* that will be discussed in the next chapter. She holds a similar opinion that kings and knights only differ in the degree of worthiness.

[115] In fact "Christ" means "the anointed one." Sarah Wood suggests that in giving this alternative reading of the titles, Conscience works "within the outlines of similar discussions of the names in sermons" ("'Ecce Rex'" 42), which also reveals his interest in knighthood as a knight himself.

And muche wo in this world wilnen and suffren.

(. . . when we are tempted,

To fight and defend ourselves from falling into sin,

And see by his sorrow that whoever loves joy,

To penance and to poverty he must submit himself,

And to desire and endure much woe in this world.) (19.64-8)[116]

Poverty and penance have become more than something to be patiently endured, but people should actively seek them. However, one sets on a rugged path in seeking self-denial, and even Jesus himself does not become a king and conqueror right after he is born. He must learn all things (it has been previously mentioned that Piers taught him how to heal others) as a novice knight does, during which he suffers. Suffering does not conform to the idea of a conqueror in the conventional sense with “manye sleightes, / And manye wiles and wit” (19.99-100), and it is only in Christ that these two are perfectly fused. It is also in this passus that Langland offers his final attempt at answering the question of the definition of Dowel: Christ changes from Dowel to Dobet and finally to Dobest.[117] He is capable of performing small miracles such as turning water into wine when he still lives with his mother. When he has become a young adult and a manifestation of Dobet, he brings solace to the sorrowful. It is not until his resurrection that he teaches his disciples how

[116] Kean, however, suggests that Langland underlines a fundamental difference of the life of Christ and that of ordinary human beings, and that the poet does not propose any *imitatio Christi* in detail (106).

[117] As Priscilla Martin argues, Langland seems to suggest that although his characters argue intensely about numerous intellectual dilemmas, at the deepest level they do not really matter (54). Similarly, Robert Franks suggests that Langland never gives any final summary of the definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, nor does he ever suggest which definitions are correct. Contrary to the view that Dowel, Dobet and Dobest represent active life, contemplative life, and Episcopal life (noted by Frank 34–37), I argue that this triad, because of the great instability of the meaning of each term, as that of knight, king, and conqueror, is a literary device Langland adopts to elaborate the meaning of Dowel in two or three parts as he sees appropriate. See also Frank 37.

to Dobest (giving pardon and mercy to all men if they have fulfilled the conditions of penance). The poet seems to suggest that the three Do's, like the knightly triad, differ in quantity rather than quality.[118] Likewise, in imitating Christ one always aims at a higher degree of perfection because true perfection is unattainable.

After witnessing the key moment in the redemption of the human race and with ultimate questions about personal salvation having been answered, we finally move back to the fair field in the Prologue and Passus I. The last story in *Piers Plowman*, however, is a sad if not disheartening one.[119] I will briefly recapitulate the main events and highlight a few points before examining in detail two scenes in the final passus: the attack of Nature at the invocation of Conscience and the infiltration of Friar Flatterer which results in the ultimate fall of Unity. Conscience urges Will to pay respect to Grace, who foretells the coming of Antichrist and his followers and claims that Conscience will surely fail without Christ's aid. Giving gifts to all trades in society, Grace commends social equality so that no trade should despise another. In the manner of organizing a kingdom, he further appoints Conscience as the king, and Craft as his Steward (19.258). Piers in the last two passus is clearly identified with St. Peter,[120] who becomes the manager of the church, which is based on four gospels and works by four Latin Fathers. After seeding four Cardinal Virtues, Piers is instructed to build a barn on Christ's cross and crown of thorns, walled

[118] Sarah Wood, calling the knightly triad Conscience's "'sermon' on Christ's kingship" ("'Ecce Rex'" 50), primarily focuses Christ's kingship. J. A. Burrow, however, believes that it is Christ's role as a conqueror that "Conscience directs his whole argument" ("Conscience of Knights, Kings, and Conquerors" 85), pointing to the end of the poem where the conqueror is betrayed.

[119] I am not alone in having this feeling. Priscilla Martin also notes that "the parallelism of the opening and close of B is formally satisfying but spiritually distressing" (29).

[120] This identification has been suggested earlier: "*Petrus, id est, Christus*" (15.212). James Simpson offers an alternative explanation for this remark, which he regards as a riddle. Piers (*petrus* means stone in Latin) is a figure in the Old Testament (the water-giving rock struck by Moses in the desert) through whom Will may find Christ (193).

with Christ's suffering and Passion.[121]

It is not long before the forces of evil are again busy at work, and soon the barn is besieged by Pride. In particular, confession and contrition, two horses ordered to pull the cart of Christendom, will be damaged by sophistry so that Conscience will not be able to distinguish a Christian from a heathen,[122] nor will lawful wealth be distinguished from usury.[123] Conscience advises everyone take cover inside Unity because Pride is too strong to withstand without Grace. As a line of defence, a moat is dug and filled by all kinds of penitential acts. Conscience, considering that they are now safe from attacks, suggests that Christians dine together and have the Eucharist. There is one condition, however, which is that everyone should forgive others, following Christ's example who has absolved the entire human race. Not everyone is willing to obey his orders, though, and many express their dissents. The speech by an ignorant vicar, among others, is quite illuminating. The only cardinals he has ever heard are those in the Pope's court, he says, an indication of his disbelief in Conscience's ability to transform society, and further of his mistrust of secular powers in general. Let Grace guide the clergy and Piers become the emperor of this world so that everyone would be turned into proper Christians, he says, but Conscience should stay at the king's court and not leave that place.[124] It is difficult to tell whether the vicar says all these in earnest or sarcastically, but it might be too rash to draw the conclusion that Langland is now disillusioned with social reformation carried out by human

[121] Then Piers disappears from the narrative without any specific reason. For "the effects of the incomplete narratives, unreliable structures, evanescent character" (Martin 52) in *Piers Plowman*, see Martin 52-4. Burrow comments on the military metaphor that "the apostolic barn of the church is converted, somewhat awkwardly, into a 'peel' or fortified farmstead" (*Langland's Fictions* 70).

[122] Note that earlier Conscience is regarded as a heathen as well.

[123] A distinction Langland makes at various points.

[124] Probably a reference to Conscience the knight in the *Visio*.

agents.[125] Langland's pacifism is also clearly seen, which offers a fine point of comparison with crusade propaganda. The Pope who should help people, instead "s[ou]deth hem that sleeth swiche as he sholde save (pays the people who kill those he should save)" (19.433). This might be referring to the conflicts between Avignon and Rome after the Great Schism, but Langland could also be thinking about the conversion of non-believers that he previously fervently urges the clergy to undertake. At the end of this passus Langland shows the reader that the ideal of social justice might be easily distorted under seemingly just pretences by the aristocracy. A nobleman declares that he can take whatever he likes guided by *Spiritus Intellectus* and *Spiritus Fortitudinis* (467-8).[126] Similarly, the king conveniently takes the law into his own hands. Because he is the head of the body politic, *Spiritus Iusticie* allows him to take his subjects' belongings, contravening Piers's admonitions for the knight in the half-acre scene and elsewhere. However, acknowledging that the king is in fact entitled to his arrogant claims provided that he rules his kingdom justly, Conscience's protest seems rather weak.[127]

After a brief encounter with Need, who praises the value of temperance, the Dreamer falls asleep once again and sees the Antichrist besieging Unity.[128] Only those who are not afraid to suffer are capable of withstanding his onslaught. Conscience, finding himself in a very disadvantageous position,

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[125] The words of Langland's faulty characters, especially in passages of social criticism, often contain much truth. Calling the vicar ignorant may well be like calling the fool in King Lear foolish. A similar episode is when Haukyn says he has never seen true Charity.
[126] In Passus XX Need teaches the Dreamer that *Spiritus Fortitudinis* often acts too severely or too leniently, and *Spiritus Iusticie* is easily manipulated by the aristocracy and the populace (20.25-30). Need further argues that because Christ wanted to experience the power of Need, which humbles people, everyone should follow his example and renounce wealth. However, Need also suggests earlier that in order to survive all measures are acceptable provided one follows *Spiritus Temperancie* (20.10-22).
[127] Priscilla Martin argues that the position of Conscience as the faculty distinguishing right from wrong is weakened in the last two passus (122-9).
[128] For the relationship between Need and temperance, and their places in medieval scholastic thought, see Bloomfield 135-43.

suggest to the so-called fools, who are in fact pure-hearted Christians on his side, that they should retreat into Unity and summon Nature (20.74-77). Nature here, accompanied by diseases and Death, should be understood as the inevitable and destructive forces in life. Piers Plowman in the half-acre scene summons Hunger to coerce idle people to work for food, but Conscience with his newly attained supernatural power conjures something far deadlier. Death, the ultimate equalizer, does not discriminate and strikes even the most powerful members of society, turning into dust

> Kynges and knyghtes, kaysers and popes.
> Lered ne lewed, he lefte no man stonde
> That he hitte evene, that evere stired after.
> Manye a lovely lady and [hir] lemmans knyghtes
> Swowned and swelted for sorwe of Dethes dyntes.
> (Kings and knights, emperors and pope
> Learned or not, he left no man standing
> Whoever he has hit, does not stir a bit.
> Many a lovely lady and their lover knights
> Swooned and died because of Death's blows.) (20.101-5)

Out of his "curteisie" Conscience, expecting people to repent, pleads with Nature to stop (20.106). However, as the reader would probably expect, the sinners are immediately swayed by vices and resume their attack. In no other part of the poem is there a stronger sense of irony than can be perceived in these lines. Greed is "kene . . . boold and bidynge" (20.141-2) in fighting and even Conscience wishes that the former is on his side. Christ sacrifices himself so that Life can defeat Death, but now Death is the power that keeps people from sinning and Life becomes the antagonist, who despises virtues and allies with sins. Then Conscience is compelled to summon "Elde", Old Age, who teaches Life that Death cannot be stopped and medicine ultimately

fails.

Old Age takes its toll on the Dreamer, who is then advised to go to Unity through confession and contrition. Nature assures him that as long as he learns how to love, he would not need to worry about his physical needs.[129] In Unity the Dreamer sees Conscience defending the besieged barn. Some of the inhabitants in Unity find penance too hard for them and seek an easier approach. Conscience, having acknowledged that Piers Plowman provides all the penance people ever need, still allows Friar Flatterer to be brought into Unity. Peace at first stops the friar, remembering his treacherous behaviour in a previous encounter. However,

> Hende-Speche heet Pees tho, "Opene the yates.
> Lat in the frere and his felawe, and make hem fair cheere.
> He may se and here here, so may bifalle,
> That Lif thorugh his loore shal leve coveitise,
> And be adrad of deeth and withdrawe hym fram pryde,
> And acorde with Conseience and kisse hir either oother."
> (Good manners bade Peace though, "Open the gates.
> Let in the friar and his companion, and give them a warm welcome.
> He may see and hear here, so that it may happen,
> That Life shall abandon greed through his teaching,
> And dread death and withdraw himself from pride,
> And accord with Conscience and they will kiss each other.")
> (20.349-54)

Peace's reaction to the friar is parallel to that in his confrontation with Wrong in the *Visio* – he has to react favourably to any friendly overture, especially after Meed has arranged compensation to be paid. The friar

[129] Conscience has given Haukyn a similar message in Passus XIV.

replaces painful penance with moral license purchasable by money, which Meed has tried to obtain for Wrong, and as a consequence all of the residents are weakened and oblivious of sins so that when Conscience again calls Clergy for aid he finds himself alone and helpless.[130] With neither clergy nor friars available to Conscience, self-help is the only way left. Finally calling on nature to avenge him and send him help and healing, Conscience leaves in search of Piers Plowman,[131] at which point the poem reaches its abrupt ending.

However, Conscience's final failure has been foreshadowed early in the poem. Although the precepts of knighthood of maintaining social order are proposed at the very beginning, the danger of mistaking leniency for mercy is soon illustrated. In Passus VI, Piers assigns tasks to all pilgrims so that they can plough the half-acre before setting out with him. A knight, which Allan H. Bright calls a character "more than sketched, or of whom the portrait is pleasant" (58)[132] willingly offers himself for the task. But Piers declines his offer and says he is willing to till his share as long as he promises to protect the Holy Church and protect the land from thieves and wasters and hunt down vermin. "Curteisly" he answers and says that he is a true knight (6.33). Piers has one more request for him, that he should treat his tenants well, and even when they deserve punishment, temper that with mercy: because all men are equal in the afterlife, he should be humble. Piers's request for the knight's

[130] Note that in the dinner scene, before Conscience leaves with Patience, Clergy prophesies that one day Conscience will grow weary of wandering and wish Clergy to be on his side. However, when Conscience calls Clergy in extremis, the latter never shows up, but only incompetent and treacherous friars answer the call. Perhaps as a knight (albeit transformed), Conscience still depends on the clergy to fulfill his religious obligations.

[131] Robert Frank, however, concurring with Konrad Burdach, argues that the Piers Conscience sets out to look for is not Christ but "an ideal pope, the executor of the divine will on earth through the power of penance conferred on him by Christ" (117).

[132] For the identification of the knight with a certain James de Brockbury and Clergie in Passus XI and XII in the A-text, see Bright 58-65.

leniency when dealing with the latter's underlings' wrongdoings, as well as his reminder that ultimately all human beings are equal, are reminiscent of Christ's merciful acts of absolving sinners and his title "Son of Man" marking that he is a member of the human race. However, when finally pillagers come and the knight is reminded of his promise, he "curteisly" speaks to Waster (6.164), but when the latter defies his warning, the knight fails to take action, leaving Piers with no other choice but to invoke supernatural aid in the form of Hunger, which only functions temporarily. What all these characters, including the transformed Conscience, fail to see is that while justice is not mankind's ultimate need, currently it is the most urgent need in a society in peril. The strict Old Law of *Redde quod debes*, a phrase used multiple times in the poem, cannot be completely substituted for by the New Law of love in the imperfect world.

3.8 Conclusion

Conscience's loud cry awakens the Dreamer and perhaps also strikes the reader with awe. *Piers Plowman* being a very consistent poem, Langland discusses a lot of issues in several places from different perspectives throughout his work, such as the corruption of friars (this theme is far less prominent in the C-text) and of people in general because of worldly riches, the exploitation of the common people by the aristocracy, and most importantly, the meaning of the triad of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.[133] For the sake of clarity when dealing with an already very complex issue, I have discussed the *Vita* in greater detail, in which Langland is mainly concerned with the road to personal salvation, which is pursued by imitating Christ. While Langland's primary concern is not about chivalry, he nonetheless suggests a chivalric ideal that all knights should aspire to. There is clear evidence that Langland is familiar with the romance tradition, which he absorbs and then transforms in order to advocate a spiritual knighthood as is exemplified by Christ. Although Langland's portrayal of Christ features far less of his suffering and pain during the Passion than many contemporary works belonging to the tradition of affective piety, the Christ-Knight is the ultimate ideal for passive and patient knighthood nonetheless, and in tempering justice with mercy, he is further a perfect combination of both aspects of knighthood: defence against disruptive forces and personal humility, thus setting an example for ideal spiritual knighthood, invalidating secular knighthood's claims by the

[133] The importance of poverty and patience, for example, is also discussed by Scripture when the Dreamer tries to find the road to salvation through learning. In Passus XI, she first praises patiently endured poverty as "bothe bettre and blesseder by many fold than richesse" (256), which is sour at first but has a sweet after-taste. Soon she has to acknowledge wealth as a necessity and in an analogy between knighthood and priesthood, Scripture claims that a knight is wretched and should not have been knighted in the first place, who "hath nother lond ne lynage riche ne good loos of hise handes" (295) and likewise priests who do not have "konnynge ne kyn (knowledge nor a good family background)" are not suitable for their job (297).

absence of pompous display in him as well as patient submission. The imitation of Christ is carried out by penance, including patient suffering and renouncing wealth. In the poem Conscience can be seen as a knight imitating Christ by these means. In accordance with the tradition of penitential romance, the protagonist must at one point realize his own faults. Conscience first sees that his main problem lies with improper use of wealth (his past wrongdoings are recounted retrospectively.) Then while his psychological status remains hidden to the reader, “off stage” he begins his transformation, which is completed by Patience’s education. In the dinner scene there is already no trace of any covetousness of wealth, but Conscience still sets off as a humble seeker of truth. In the rest of the poem he can hardly be seen as a knight in the ordinary sense, but he, following the narrative pattern in conventional penitential romances such as *Guy of Warwick*, turns into an authoritative religious figure, who is able to lecture on theological topics with authority such as the right way to do penance and the meaning of the word “Christ.” He is also capable of calling forth supernatural forces to carry out his will, as Piers has done earlier, further linking him to Christ. Besides, as a fine piece of social criticism, Langland explores the social dimension of the *imitatio Christi* more than authors of chivalric romances usually do. The aristocracy and the clergy should themselves become examples to be followed by the commoners, and imitating Christ contributes to maintaining harmony and social order. Such chivalric obligations are fulfilled by Conscience, as he remains in charge of guarding the besieged Unity just as a knight commander protecting a city under attack.

However, Langland’s poem is teeming with moral ambiguities and the reader often finds that the poet is less absolute about his claims and sometimes he has to make concessions to the strict chivalric ideal stipulated elsewhere. Human beings are fallible and therefore they can never attain true

perfection. In principle wealth is inferior to poverty, but riches gained in a proper way are said to be preferable to pauperism in another dream. The perfect celestial knighthood, which is exemplified by Christ through his patient suffering and perfect combination of justice and mercy, cannot be fulfilled in a corrupted world, in which it is almost impossible to maintain the subtle balance between the two aspects, especially when the corruptive forces of worldly wealth, a necessity that is even used by saints, are busy at work. As Haukyn claims, sinning is inevitable. Meeting the demands of Dowel alone is a strenuous task considering mankind's propensity to sin, and because human beings almost always fall short of the ideal, the spiritual solution of penance is destined to fail if it is not radical enough, and pure mercy, often referred to as "courtesy" in the poem, is in fact a form of injustice. The chief difficulty in successfully tempering justice with mercy on the human part lies in the fact that the boundaries between forces of evil, which Christ himself does not pardon, and sinning human beings who are not yet beyond redemption, are not clear-cut in real life. In addition, human knights do not have the ability to attack the root of wickedness without punishing its human agents at the same time, that is, they simply do not have the transformative power that Christ's love has on sinners. As a consequence, this is only an impractical ideal.

In particular, Langland is intentionally ambiguous in making Conscience, the tried and transformed knight, responsible for the infiltration of the depraved friars offering facile and paralysing absolution. Possibly it is a continuation of the criticism of the courtly lifestyle, with its focus on courtesy easily degenerating into weakness. This theme is prominent in other parts of the poem including the *Visio* King's indulgence of Meed and, as some critics argue, Conscience's gentle treatment of the Doctor. Alternatively, as a less likely interpretation of the episode, it might show that Conscience truly

understands and tries to practice the ultimate lesson of Dobest taught by Patience “love your enemies” and pays a great price for that noble but impracticable ideal, which can only be fulfilled with divine aid. The failure of Conscience proves that idealized spiritual knighthood cannot exist in this world, and mankind must seek Christ’s aid as the last resort.

In such ambiguities lies a great part of the charm of *Piers Plowman*. By discussing the endeavours and failures of the knights in personal and social transformation in “an imaginary space within which the irreconcilables can coexist in some kind of precariously just equilibrium” (*Langland’s Fictions* 3), Langland addresses the conflicts between the Christian faith and personal experience, ideal and reality. As Priscilla Martin eloquently argues, “Possibly the paradoxes of Christianity, such as the simultaneous absolutes of God’s justice and mercy, must, when deeply felt, produce such tensions” (31). Human beings can only try to find a reconciliation of these absolute claims. Perhaps Need is not being entirely boastful when it claims that “is no vertue bi fer to *Spiritus Temperancie* (no virtue is comparable to Temperance by far)” (20.23).

So far I have surveyed the way in which the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* has moulded the depiction of idealized knights in two major literary works in late medieval England. The next chapter will examine a group of non-literary texts to explore whether and how their authors see the *imitatio* as a necessity for knights in reality.

Chapter 4. The *Imitatio* in More Pragmatic Contexts

King Henry V:
“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger”
–Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act III, Scene I

Lord Clifford:
“And, Henry, hadst thou sway'd as kings should do,
Or as thy father and his father did,
Giving no ground unto the house of York,
They never then had sprung like summer flies;
. . .
For what doth cherish weeds but gentle air?
And what makes robbers bold but too much lenity?”
–Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI,* Act II, Scene VI

The narratives hitherto examined are relatively autonomous entities which for the most part are able to resist or circumvent the constraints of reality. The Grail story does not massively deviate from its fictional sources set in the past, and while Langland does express his grave concerns over the political situation in late fourteenth-century England, the transformation of Conscience and the story of Christ the Knight seem to be quite untouched by such concerns. By studying these fictional works we can only get an incomplete picture of expressions of the ideal of the *imitatio*, because the penitent and Christ-like knight – like *homo religiosus*, *homo æconomicus*, *homo politicus*, “phantoms which are convenient providing they do not become nuisances,” – is a single facet of a more complex issue. As Bloch continues, “a civilization, like a person, is no mechanically arranged game of solitaire; the knowledge of fragments, studied by turns, each for its own sake, will never

produce the knowledge of the whole" (128).[1]

This chapter, therefore, will be different from the previous two in three main respects. First, it examines multiple texts instead of a single work, and these texts, unlike the fictional *Le Morte d'Arthur* and the allegorical *Piers Plowman*, are either chivalric manuals or in the case of Caxton, the prologues and epilogues to his chivalric publications. Although Leyerle argues that "the fictions of chivalric literature are close to the realities of late medieval aristocratic life precisely because that society tended to pattern its chivalric conduct on literary texts" (131),[2] medieval people made concessions when they could not fully execute them, as is always the case for all ideals. It is these concessions that this chapter aims to explore. Because very little can be known about the authors and their times from the enclosed narratives of the Grail quest and Conscience's journey, a study of these pragmatic writings, in which the authors presumably address some of the primary concerns in their days, might allow us to take a fuller glimpse into the ideal's many manifestations in late medieval England. Such texts, although comprising a large number of *exempla*, are nonetheless primarily didactic rather than conventionally fictional. Their chief purpose is to instruct (or purport to instruct) monarchs/lower members of the aristocratic hierarchy and knights with respect to proper behaviour in both war and peace. These texts, therefore, with their largely practical objectives, in a certain sense are closer to mundane contemporary social realities than idealized stories of chivalric quests and

[1] In the original context Bloch is explaining why studies of economic history, religious history, and political history are insufficient if we want to gain a good understanding of the past. I believe this applies to the study of literature as well—hence this chapter's greater reliance on historical sources than previous ones.

[2] Richard Barber shares a similar view that "chivalry was not something which lent itself to teaching by handbook or learning by rote; it was the example of heroic figures, whether from the romances or from real life, which was a far more potent inspiration"(*The Knight and Chivalry* 140–41).

adventures.

Secondly, crusade propaganda, as a special kind of instructions for knights (to the entire society at certain stages of its development), is briefly examined. Distant echoes of the crusading spirit can be found in numerous chivalric romances, and no discussion of imitating Christ is complete without considering this radical form, which has been hitherto overlooked in this thesis and which is usually regarded as fundamentally at variance with the true Christian spirit by modern commentators. I do not attempt, however, to undertake a detailed examination of the ideal of the *imitatio* in crusade propaganda, which could be the topic of another thesis or scholarly monograph. The inclusion in this chapter of an examination of a single treatise on crusading ideals, St. Bernard's *In Praise of New Knighthood*, provides ample evidence for the complexities of the ideal of imitating Christ and the existence of a whole tradition that some modern readers may not be fully aware of (or refuse to acknowledge).

Lastly, rather than analyzing the manifestation of the ideal of the *imitatio* in specific literary texts, this chapter attempts to locate this ideal in the tradition of instruction manuals for the military class in late medieval England and France. While the authors' opinions differ on certain issues, I believe such works in general reaffirm established commonplaces rather than express individual voices or address very specific contemporary events.[3] What seems to distinguish these treatises from *Piers Plowman* and *Le Morte* is that they do not go so far as to clearly differentiate between secular and celestial forms of knighthood. As has been previously discussed, a pattern that can be observed in chivalric romances in which penance is a major theme is that the

[3] There are, of course, exceptions to this statement. Caxton, for example, would modify his sources to better suit his English readers. This issue will be discussed in the section on Caxton when needed.

protagonist often undergoes a transformational process, gaining a deeper understanding of Christianity or even turning himself into a hermit, and traces of such a transformation might be present in works not conventionally regarded as penitential romances: Sir Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* discards the illusory assumption that an earthly knight can gain true perfection as symbolized by the pentangle on his shield after he discovers his failure in the green knight's ultimate test and learns the true meaning of humility, a lesson his companions are willing to partake in by wearing green girdles, turning the symbol of shame into a reminder. Speaking of the characters examined in this thesis, although Lancelot and Conscience enter the clerical profession at the end of their stories respectively, it is manifest that they do not completely attain perfection. Although Malory does not disparage Lancelot as the French *Queste* has done, recognizing that earthly knighthood is good enough for human beings, after all it is the otherworldly Galahad and the other two Grail knights who are the embodiment of the higher religious ideal and as a consequence the only successful participants in the quest for the Holy Grail. Likewise, Conscience fails as the guardian of Unity and at the end of *Piers Plowman* we see him once again setting out to look for Christ, the celestial knight that has won human salvation from Death.

The exhortations that knights should renounce the world to reach true perfection feature in the chivalric manuals far less frequently than the modern reader might expect, and the authors and presumably their original readers seem rather content with secular chivalry as long as it is refined into a purified and idealized state. The authors, of course, urge their readers to always remember Christ's salvation, and Christ-like qualities such as patience are what separate good knights from ordinary warriors. Yet in the instruction manuals there seems to be an absence of specific and practical instructions for the kings/knights to imitate Christ (not taking into consideration the

crusading tradition for the moment) with the Christian virtues generally presented in secularized forms, and the modern reader might feel that the narrators sometimes merely pay lip service to these virtues. In fact, violence and the fear it generates were often regarded as a crucial factor in successful knightly/kingly careers as well as regimes, as the comparison between Henry V and Henry VI in Shakespeare's plays may lead the reader to think. We have seen hints about this idea in Malory and Langland, and this thought is also shared by some of the authors to be examined. The chief purpose of this chapter is to investigate the absence of explicit exhortations for knights to imitate Christ in the passive way in the chivalric manuals, and what it reveals about the way the ideal is employed. However, I do not intend this to be a comprehensive study, but rather to gesture to some points that might merit consideration in viewing the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* in late medieval England (and perhaps Western Europe in general).

There are four sections in this chapter. In the first section, I will study three chivalric manuals written by St. Bernard, Geoffroi de Charny, and Ramon Llull. My hope is that these three works represent the various forms medieval chivalric manuals could take (excluding manuals of a technical/legal nature, such as Pizan's *Feats of Arms*, which do not provide suitable materials for the purpose of this thesis), and the images of the ideal knight they portray offer a very interesting comparison among themselves. St. Bernard's treatise calls for a violent form of the ideal of the *imitatio* that is completely different from the (relative) pacifism previously seen; Charny focuses his work on encouraging chivalric prowess; Llull, being a former knight, acknowledges the necessity of violence and fear without hesitation, although he also discusses knights' religious obligations in detail. In the second section I will use a survey of Christine de Pizan's *Book of the Body Politic* to argue that according to orthodox medieval political theories, as far as

chivalric virtues are concerned, kings and knights only differ in the expected degrees of upholding these virtues.[4] And as a consequence the chivalric qualities are also applicable to kings, who ideally should be model fighters. Finally, I will examine Caxton's prologues and epilogues to some of his representative chivalric publications as useful comparisons with the chivalric manuals. Caxton is important also because two of the texts he published are among the key texts in this thesis: Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Llull's *Order of Chivalry*. Other publications by Caxton that are to be examined include another of Pizan's treatises mentioned earlier, *Feats of Arms*, which is largely a compilation of technical chivalric manuals and legal treatises,[5] and the other two in Caxton's Christian Worthies publishing scheme: *Siege of Jerusalem* (the stories of Godfrey of Bouillon) and *Charles the Great* (the stories of Charlemagne).[6] As a businessman, and a successful one at that, Caxton's choice of materials might be a sign of the popular taste and mainstream views on chivalry among the English aristocracy in his time. In the final section I wrap up my argument that the ideal of the *imitatio*, like many other ideals, is rather fluid, and can be interpreted in various ways. While self-denying and peaceable knights in literary works impress us, we should not forget about the other tradition in which the use of arms is reconcilable with imitating Christ.

[4] Compare the similarities between imitating Christ and imitating saints, a topic discussed in Chapter I.

[5] Considering Pizan's objective to introduce treatises on warfare to practitioners, who were unlikely to know the classics, it might seem unreasonable to dismiss her work. Her ideal to encourage military discipline instead of knights' and common soldiers' more individualistic goals, though unrealistic, reflects a desire to remould outdated military conventions and chivalry's adaptability to social evolutions (Willard, *Christine de Pizan* 184–86).

[6] From the prologues to works in this trilogy, we are told that Caxton first published *Siege of Jerusalem* on 20 November 1481, followed by *The Morte D'arthur* published on 31 July 1485 and soon after *Charles the Great* on 1 December 1485. In the three prologues Caxton always lists the three characters in chronological order and reminds the reader of the titles they used to hold.

4.1 Chivalric Manuals: Three Texts

I will first take a close look at several popular and influential medieval chivalric manuals. In fact, none of the key texts I will be discussing are English in origin, although they enjoyed an elite readership in England and throughout Western Europe. I choose the following three texts in the hope that they form a reasonably representative sample of this genre, which is so varied in itself that it almost ceases to be a single genre at all. The *Liber ad Milites Templi: De Laude Novae Militiae* is St. Bernard's fervent praise of the highly spiritual "New Chivalry" epitomized by the fledging Knights Templar. *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, a work less loaded with priestly language despite being written by a Franciscan tertiary, carries the advice from Ramon Llull, a cleric who used to be a knight, to novice knights (both in the work's fictional setting and in reality). Geoffroi de Charny wrote his *Book of Chivalry* as the only practicing knight among the three authors. In addition, Llull's work was translated and published by William Caxton which both reflected and further contributed to its popularity. The image of the perfect knight, as we shall see, varies significantly in these treatises, ranging from Bernard's comprehensive religious idealism to Charny's sheer pragmatism at times. At this early stage I only wish to note that even Bernard's celestial warrior is not the penitential and passive knight that works such as *Piers Plowman* feature, and the crucial tradition of holy warriors, who are agents of violence but fully imitative of Christ nonetheless, has not been given due notice in the previous chapters. Although in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England crusading had well passed its peak and was almost a distant memory,[7] this ideal persisted in the collective memory of Europeans.

[7] Because of the numerous failures in crusading endeavours and the consequent questioning of these efforts "Crusading became more peripheral, its moral image replacing personal experience . . . crusade imagery, ideology, scriptural precedents and rhetoric were appropriated by secular national rulers" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* 26). In fact, for "many crusade-infected writers of the later middle ages,

Crusading literature being the most representative media of this tradition, a significant part of this chapter will be discussing how St. Bernard's treatise is an ideal specimen of such works. It seems that the author still stresses motifs such as penitence and the imitation of Christ, but they function in a drastically different way from penitential romances. The ideal of patient suffering simply cannot coexist with the grim reality on the battlefield. The Knights Templar are said to imitate Christ, but it is done when they ruthlessly slaughter infidels. The other chivalric manuals are similar cases. Llull does emphasize the importance of the seven Christian virtues in his treatise, yet he maintains that knights perform their duties through fear and are definitely inferior to clerics. Charny regards martial prowess as the defining knightly quality, and his advice about proper chivalric behaviour is less rigorous.

According to Maurice Keen, the classic account of the function of medieval chivalry, such as that proposed by Huizinga in *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, is that "outside literature, chivalry really was no more than a polite veneer, a thing of forms and words and ceremonies which provided a means whereby the well-born could relieve the bloodiness of life by decking their activities with a tinsel gloss from romance" (3).[8] He also points out that there are two other types of source materials from which we can garner versions of medieval ideas about chivalry. The first is treatises written by churchmen, which, fused with religious zeal, "makes reality look mean by contrasting it with an inaccessible measure of dedication" (5). The other type is chivalric treatises,[9] which Keen deems as most useful when one tries to find a working

crusading was essentially a utopian metaphor, at times a fairly whimsical one at that" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* 29).

[8] While I do not entirely agree with Keen's view that chivalric romances are "a literature of escape" (3), and my previous two chapters provide ample proof for my view, his categorization of historical sources on chivalry is very useful and my thesis is indebted to the framework he proposes.

[9] In this chapter I label all treatises on chivalry as "chivalric manuals."

model of the real meaning of chivalry. The chivalric treatises are under the influence of both romances and ecclesiastical thought, and they by no means convey a unified message. Keen himself also acknowledges that they also present ideals of chivalry that are “too rosy or too lofty” (6). The three works he selects as “[making an attempt] to treat of chivalry as a way of life in its own right, and to offer instruction to that end” (6) are: the anonymous *Ordene de chevalerie*, the *Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* by Ramon Llull, and Geoffroi de Charny’s *Book of Chivalry*. The latter two are among the three chivalric manuals discussed at greater length in this chapter. St. Bernard’s *In Praise of the New Knighthood* complements the picture in supplying a form of chivalry more infused with religious intensity but no less dependent on violence.

Before moving on to the chivalric manuals themselves, a few words need to be said about medieval attitudes towards violence in general. Judging from the historical/legal sources Warren C. Brown examines, in the Middle Ages resorting to violence to protect one’s own rights is perfectly acceptable and sometimes praiseworthy. To avoid or renounce violence, under certain circumstances, could risk shame and victimization, leading to the collapse of polities in extreme cases. Therefore deeds of violence, provided that they are properly performed with good intentions, were not considered as something shameful. Consequently, churchmen and the aristocracy practiced violence as everyone did, and Christianity was not always found at odds with violence. Although commoners were usually the victims of aristocratic violence, sources show that their attitudes towards violence were similar. Norms of violence, on the other hand, varied greatly according to the context, with inconsonant voices at the margin. These norms were always being contested with the shifting patterns of power, and the competition between the state and the individual persisted until modern times. What really differs between the medieval world view and ours is that in the Middle Ages people in general

believed they had the right to use violence by themselves without being regulated by the state. It was the medieval monarchs who began to use God's peace as an excuse to maintain their monopoly of violence, a claim subsequently supported by ruling classes in different ages. As a consequence, the norms of public order have gradually become the primary mode of understanding and evaluating violent behaviour. [10] The imprinting of Charlemagne's model of reserving the use of violence only for the monarch, and later, state, is so strong that people now take it for granted and use it to evaluate the "success" or "failure" of other ways of understanding violence. Only after recognizing that there were other models, regardless of our preferences and more often biases, is it possible to understand these ideas.

[10] For a detailed account of changing norms of violence in the Middle Ages and their post-medieval legacies, see Brown, especially 288-97.

4.1.1 A Monk's Guide to Knights' Imitation of Christ: St. Bernard's *De Laude Novae Militiae*

Jonathan Riley-Smith in his succinct yet well-informed overview of crusade studies during the last decades points out that more scholarly attention has been paid to crusaders themselves due to the new light shed upon combat psychiatry and theories of just wars ("The Crusading Movement and Historians" 6). [11] In addition, while material gain used to be held as the crusaders' primary motivation, it has been acknowledged that the appeal of ideological violence may have been the main incentive for crusaders ("The Crusading Movement and Historians" 6–8),[12] for whom a theory of just war was created by unifying and transforming the concepts of pilgrimage, penance, and just theory (Bachrach 108).[13] It is true that the crusaders

[11] Jonathan Riley-Smith gives a fuller account of the entire academic history of crusade studies in *The Crusades: A History*, in which, among other things, he discusses how "materialism" was challenged by "sentient empathy" (*The Crusades* 10–11). Scholars have argued about the definition of crusades as well. Traditionalists regard them as campaigns whose aim is to recover Jerusalem or to assist in its recovery; pluralists view them as a special kind of holy war. Jonathan Riley-Smith, among others, takes the latter view, and because this section is more concerned about the intellectual background rather than crusading practices, the latter meaning of crusades is adopted here. For a more detailed account of the definitions of the crusade, see Housley, *Contesting the Crusades* 1–23. Jonathan Riley-Smith believes that despite the difficulties in defining crusades, both the crusaders in the conventional sense and the brothers/sisters of the military orders were crusaders, who commit themselves to wars that were both holy and penitential. Housley suggests that while crusaders and monks in military orders are totally different in many aspects, "this seems too surgical an approach" (*Contesting the Crusades* 21), and that, quoting Giles Constable, contemporaries had similar difficulties in categorizing the Templars and crusaders as warriors, monks or pilgrims. Similarly, Nikolas Jaspert acknowledges that the differences between a member of a military order and a crusader are very difficult to pin down (145). Because this section addresses military ethos in a general sense, such minute technical details are not considered.

[12] Two signs of excessive religious justification of violence and the soldiers' perception of the crusade as a new and sanctified type of war during the First Crusade, for example, are the physical appearances of military saints along with their armies in combat and priests serving on the battlefield more consistently than in ordinary battles. For details, see Bachrach 125-7. Such features, including the religious rites conducted before the commencement of battles, as the author later points out, became a normal part of crusading warfare in the following centuries (135, 139, 144, 147), with the most striking element of continuity being confession, prayers, and masses (149).

[13] Such a theory was not easily created. It was difficult to justify using violence as a form

committed atrocities and indiscipline, but the modern practice of underplaying the importance of crusades in the history of Christianity is in fact reshaping the past: the crusading ideal was supported by canonized theologians including St. Bernard, and the crusades would never have taken place without the genuine support of the laypeople (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 4–5). Because very little can be known about the common people, studies in crusading ideology must inevitably be based on the higher social classes. It is erroneous to suggest homogeneity in any complex mode of thought, the crusading ideology being no exception to this rule, in which the ideals of the knights certainly differed from those of the churchmen ("The Crusading Movement and Historians" 10).[14] And in the same vein, the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* would be understood differently as well. As a consequence, the main purpose of this section is to bring to the fore the fluidity of the ideal of the *imitatio*.[15] While the crusaders are similar to the fictional knights such as Lancelot and Guy of Warwick in their focus on penance, a typical crusader is strikingly at odds with the image of the pacifist knight that has been examined in previous chapters. Crusades are distinguished from other holy wars as

of penance despite all the suffering the agent would endure in the process, and pilgrimage, as the most charming form of penance, was still under scrutiny until the success of the First Crusade made such doubts disappear and terms which were originally only reserved for monks began to be applied to warriors (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 32). However, this tension could not be eradicated. It is worth noting here that in Langland, Malory, as well as other penitential romances, the penance of their protagonists involve little fighting, if any at all. For just war theories in general, see Lang et al.; Walzer.

[14] While modern scholars hold various opinions as to what Urban II means in his speech that whoever undertakes to liberate Jerusalem from Muslims will gain remission of sins, it is obvious that many crusaders understood that he meant eternal salvation and salvation to those who have fallen in battle (Bachrach 124). Nikolas Jaspert, for example, suggests that Urban originally may only have meant the remission of earthly penances but later acquiesced in the reinterpretation of his words (30-2). The laity may not be as aware of the complexities and tensions between violence and love as theologians. Therefore the former's point of view is more clear-cut.

[15] For how the ideal of *imitatio Christi* was expressed in phenomena as diverse as the canonical movement and wandering preachers, see Nikolas Jaspert (29).

"collective acts of penance" (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* 19), but the ultimate fulfilment of their penances lies in the performance of their duties as warriors, not in the renunciation of this world. In fact, the moral dilemma associated with Christianity and warfare has been raised on multiple occasions by scholars. While Christianity originated as "an ostentatiously pacifist cult opposed not only to all forms of bloodshed, but also to the apparatus of religious rites that undergirded the province of Mars" (Bachrach 2), theories were developed that glorify participation in holy wars.[16] There is ample textual basis in the Bible for both interpretations, and the reader can bend the text to one's own will by highlighting suitable passages. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is quickly modified in the following biblical passages, and the use of force is not ruled out in principle in the New Testament, either: Christ does rebuke Peter for cutting off the servant's ear, but Peter is allowed to carry a sword in the first place. The crusades, frequently referred to as "negotium Christi" (Christ's business), has Christ as their ultimate authority, and Christ calling out for help, first as a father to his children, and later as a feudal lord to his vassals, is a common motif in crusade preaching (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 17–19). On the other hand, Jonathan Riley-Smith's statement "at grassroots' level people perceived Christianity to be a muscular religion" is not always accurate, for surely it is also in Bernard's mind to strike proactively. Considering the substantial expansion of the time-scale of crusade studies nowadays ("The Crusading

[16] There are numerous extant studies on these theories, see Bainton; Cadoux; Johnson, for example. In particular, Augustine's theories that God/Christ is the ultimate authority for using force as long as the intention is good and violence is neutral in the ethical sense provided the groundwork for the medieval theories of just war. One might also take a glimpse into the differences between the Old and New Testaments from the origins of the *exempla* in medieval model crusade sermons. There are three main sources for these stories: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and post-biblical saints and other historical figures, and the first category is clearly in the majority, with crusades compared to the Israelites' wars (Maier 55–56).

Movement and Historians" 11) and the vast influence St. Bernard holds for later generations, this text, while significantly earlier than others, is a valid inclusion.[17] In the medieval chivalric manuals to be examined in this section, St. Bernard's *In Praise of the New Knighthood* is the only one in which the author explicitly states that the ideal knighthood is an imitation of Christ.[18] Hugues de Payens, the first Grand Master of the newly established Knights Templar, had on a number of occasions requested Bernard to give some advice to his knights. Bernard's reply turns out to be more than a piece of exhortation. It discusses a chivalric ideal that all knights should aspire to. The close relationship between the Knights Templar and Christ is continually stressed throughout the treatise. At the very beginning, St. Bernard addresses de Payens as a "knight of Christ and Master of Christ's militia (31). The Knights Templar are connected to Christ in a geographical sense: Bernard ardently claims that "A new kind of knighthood seems recently to have appeared on the earth, and in that part of the world which the Orient from on high once visited in the flesh" (33).[19] This new knighthood "unknown in ages past" (33) is higher

[17] It is worth noting that St. Bernard was not alone in offering guidance and encouragement to the Knights Templar. Answering to the uncertainty among the Templars because of the duality of the nature of their cause, Hugh of St. Victor called for humility and persistence lest the devil spread doubt among them. Similarly, Guigo of the Grande Chartreuse argued that the Templars should conquer themselves before fighting against the physical enemy (Bulst-Thiele 58). In addition, *De Laude Novae Militiae* was not the only document St. Bernard wrote for the Templars, either. In a knight's initiation into the Order, "the service rendered by a courtly knight to his lady was spiritualized as service to Mary," which is in turn underscored by St. Bernard's writings (Bulst-Thiele 59).

[18] The Latin text of *De Laude* is from Vol.III of *S. Bernardi Opera* edited by J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais, and the reference is to a section number followed by a line number; the English translation, unless otherwise noted, is from M. Conrad Greenia's translation, and the reference is to a page number. It is worth noting that Bernard is not alone in pointing out the close relationship between the Templars and Christ. As is noted by Jonathan Riley-Smith, Pope Celestine II wrote in a bull that the Templars, as "new Maccabees in this time of Grace, renouncing earthly desires and possessions, bearing his cross, are followers of Christ" ("Crusading as an Act of Love" 179). Bernard turned out to be very successful in recruiting soldiers, as new crusaders, inspired by his preaching and writing, "donning white tunics emblazoned with a red cross, could be seen throughout the crusader states and across Europe" (Madden 49).

[19] One could well argue that the new knighthood St. Bernard praises fervently may not

than other agents of justice. We can well assume that Bernard would regard secular knighthood as inferior, which he says "[relies] solely on physical strength . . . [and therefore is] hardly astounding, since it is not uncommon" (33). Yet even spiritual combat against evil is "nothing remarkable, though . . . praiseworthy"(33), because there are numerous monks undertaking this task.[20] The new knight, therefore, is someone who performs both kinds of duties—he fights both physical and spiritual evils by both physical and spiritual means. The enemies of this new knighthood, therefore, are "foes of the cross of Christ" (34), whom Bernard encourages the knight to repel.

Before Bernard further explains what this new knighthood really is, he denounces worldly knighthood as "malitiae" (malice) (3.2).[21] The knights

be so new after all, and Bernard's suggestions are applicable to the crusading movement instead of being restricted to the particular context of the composition of the treatise. Fulcher of Chartres, who witnessed Pope Urban II's famous sermon in 1095, commends the innovative nature of the crusade despite the fact that Christians had been fighting against Muslims for decades in Spain, Sicily and North Africa at that time. His argument that the internecine violence that has plagued the Christian world can now be diverted to the right cause is shared by Bernard as will be discussed later. Similarly, Guibert of Nogent stresses the novelty in crusades, claiming that those who fall in battle against Muslims are martyrs. For details, see Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, 108-9. For a detailed account of Urban II's speech as well as the historical background of the origin of the crusading movement, see Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, 21-45.

[20] One might question his sincerity in making this remark: despite Bernard's fervent praise of the Templars, on other occasions he also regarded the cloister as preferable to a crusading vocation, persuading a certain crusader to abandon the cause for the Cistercian order, "that true Jerusalem" and even threatening fellow Cistercian monks and lay members with excommunication to prevent them from joining the crusade (Tyerman, *God's War* 277–78). Also, the boundaries between crusaders and monks have not always been clear-cut. The division took place over a course of several centuries. It is said that "theologians working just after the liberation of Jerusalem in 1099 had been concerned to monasticize the movement and to treat crusaders as temporary quasi-monks. Echoes of this attitude can still be found [from] the Cistercians Eugenius and Bernard" while by the time the Third Crusade took place it was already clearly of lay devotion (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* 108).

[21] Questions may arise as to whether St. Bernard denounces the whole chivalric system or he is simply using this dichotomy to stress the distinctions between good and bad knighthood "on the ground of qualitative criteria, connected with the implementation of moral principles of conduct proper to the ethical ideals of chivalry as they prevailed at the time" (Grabois, "Militia and Malitia" 49). The impact of the notion of *pax christiana* on society resulted in the justification of military activities by emphasizing their defensive character and blaming the enemy as the disruptor of peace. As Grabois argues, the

should carefully consider the consequences of their actions, Bernard warns, and secular knighthood only leads towards damnation for its practitioners with "the mortal sin of the victor and the eternal death of the vanquished" (37). The first sin Bernard identifies in secular knights is that they fight "tantis sumptibus ac laboribus" (3.6). They cover their horses with silk and plume their armours; their shields and saddles are painted; their bits and spurs are decorated with precious metal and stones. To make matters worse, they charge to their death "with shameful wrath and fearless folly" (37). Such decorations look like women's trinkets, and together with "effeminate tresses . . . long, voluminous tunics . . . cumbersome, flowing sleeves" (37), which not only hamper the knights' moves, but are also viewed as symbols of decadence. They suggest that the worldly knights regard battle, the cause of which is "flashes of irrational anger, hunger for empty glory, or hankering after some earthly possessions," as a "slight and frivolous" (38) business.[22] In contrast, the Knights of Christ fight for Christ, and in death they gain redemption from Christ (39). As Bernard argues in an earlier passage, Christians' actions are weighed by their intentions, and if the cause is good, the means are praiseworthy as well (35). The Knights Templar's actions in fact echo Christ's own, who ransomed and delivered his people (41).[23]

After his critique of worldly knighthood, Bernard sets out to praise the life

distinction between chivalry and malice had already become a commonplace at St. Bernard's time, though the latter adopted this distinction in a much narrower sense: i.e. between the Templars and others, and he later concedes that there are other worthy knights who did not necessarily belong to the order (54).

[22] The popes were often opposed to chivalric display. Innocent III in his letter to Duke Leopold VI of Austria compares the crusaders' "soft and gentle" cross with Christ's "bitter and hard" one, which for Jonathan Riley-Smith is a clear sign of his "disapproval of luxury and extravagance" (*The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 20). In fact, when they are not in battle, they are supposed to wear plain pilgrimage clothing, as the sculpture of Count Hugh I of Vaudémont testifies (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 30).

[23] It should be noted that here Bernard fuses Christ's lament over Jerusalem at Matthew 23:38 and Jeremiah's confirmation that God redeemed Jacob at Jeremiah 31:11-12.

style of the Knights Templar. The new knights should serve “as an exemplar or at least an embarrassment”(45) for the evil secular knights.[24] The original Latin text reads “ad imitationem seu confusionem”(7.19). The secular knights should imitate the Knights Templar in the way that the latter should imitate Christ.[25] Discipline and obedience are required in the first place (45). The knights should wear clothes and eat food per the instructions of their commander and should “shun every excess and have regard only for what is necessary” (45). Furthermore, they should not have wives or children, nor should they have personal property so that they live together in “evangelica perfectione” (7.6). Idleness must be avoided, and they also repair “their worn armor and torn clothing” (46). Fraternity seems to soften the rigid distinction between officers and soldiers, as “there is no distinction among them, and deference is shown to ability, not to nobility. They rival one another in mutual consideration, and they carry one another’s burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ” (46). Discipline must be maintained both in battle and in daily life, and the list of improper behaviour which is prohibited further includes inappropriate speech, unrestrained laughter, whispering, murmuring, playing dice and chess, hunting, falconry, and enjoying the performance of jesters, magicians, bards, and jousters, all of which are regarded as “vanities and deceitful follies” (46). Bernard does not forget to comment on the proper hairstyle of a spiritual knight. Unlike the worldly knights who keep “effeminate tresses,” the Knights Templar cut their hair short because “according to the Apostle, it is shameful for a man to cultivate flowing locks” (46–47). Following the Rule of Benedict, the Knights Templar rarely wash their hair but they are

[24] Aryeh Grabois questions whether the distinction between these two modes of chivalry means Bernard’s condemnation of the entire chivalric system or his critique of secular knighthood is based on qualitative criteria (“Militia and Malitia” 49).

[25] Similarly, as M.C. Barber notes, the Knights Templar “had indeed been in a position where it was ‘a mirror for others and an example’, a position which made it a particularly sensitive indicator and, in its turn, promoter, of social change (27).

"content to let it appear tousled and dusty, darkened by chain mail and heat" (47). Personal hygiene probably is not a major concern for Bernard.

In battle the Knights Templar are also the opposite of worldly knights. They arm themselves with steel instead of gold, their horses are not plumed, and they aim not to show off but to win. While the worldly knights are controlled by fits of anger and desire for worldly glory, the Knights Templar "are not quarrelsome, reckless, or impulsively foolhardy, but they draw up their ranks deliberately, prudently, and providently" (47).

Bernard further discusses the Knights Templar's imitation of Christ in the section on their headquarters, the Temple of Jerusalem. Their Temple is decorated with religious fervor instead of gold. While the façade is adorned, it is adorned with battle equipment such as weapons, shields, saddles, bridles, and lances. All of these are clear signs showing that the knights are driven by the same religious zeal as that of Christ, who "having his most sacred hands armed . . . entered the temple" (49) and drove away merchants as well as money changers. In their simple and rigid life style the monk-knights imitate Christ.

Yet there is another and, according to Bernard, more important, level on which the Knights Templar imitate Christ. Not fearing death is not enough, Bernard affirms, but a good knight should desire it, because "he would prefer to be dissolved and to be with Christ, by far the better thing [than fighting for Christ]" (34). A holy death is more blessed than life and victory, and death in battle is the most glorious of all (35).[26] Although the idea of warrior-martyrs

[26] Together with many other points St. Bernard makes in the short treatise, this idea is not unique to him. In the letter briefly mentioned in Note 23 of this chapter, Pope Innocent III implies that crusaders (and Christians in general) owe such massive debts to Christ that the former should not refuse to die for him or even question dying for the great cause, because their cross, sewn on crusaders' clothing with threads, is "soft and gentle," but Christ "bore one that was sharp and hard," one that was nailed to his flesh with iron and nails. Similarly Cardinal Odo of Châteauroux in a sermon enjoins his listeners to follow

was not a defining characteristic of crusades, it featured prominently. As the public held the opinion that warriors, "whose internal dispositions in the heat of battle could not be gauged, should be ranked with those who died passively for the faith . . . even senior churchmen felt [the need] to temporize when confronted by the convictions of the laity" (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 31).

Bernard's message is very different from the emphasis on patient suffering and victory in the afterlife that can be sometimes spotted in chivalric romances.[27] Christ in this work is a victorious conqueror,[28] who "drove out the powers of darkness by the strength of his mighty hand, so now he drives out their supporters, the children of disbelief" (33). Following Christ's example it is natural that the Knights Templar should vanquish the enemies of Christians

Christ to death as the ultimate expression of love for God ("Crusading as an Act of Love" 179–80). Humbert of Romans's justification of the deaths of the crusaders that the deaths were endured for God and the lessened number of Christians on earth meant more people who would otherwise not make it entered heaven may sound appalling to someone living in our age, but it had a very strong appeal to the medieval people (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* 20).

[27] According to Carl Erdmann, in the original context of the imitation of Christ, "take up your cross and follow me," what is emphasized is not its relationship with warfare and chivalry, but that with pilgrimages, and Urban was the first to bring about the unification of divine warfare and pilgrimage (348). Similarly, as André Vauchez argues, the Crusade should not be regarded simply as a sign of imperialistic expansionism, but rather as an imitation of Christ's mortification and pain in the form of a long pilgrimage. "Well adapted to [the mass's] fundamentally Manichean mentality . . . The conception of the Crusade as *gesta Dei* . . . offered warriors a means of sharing directly in the benefits of salvation, without having to give up their status and the values it entailed" (48–49). One thing that the reader of penitential romances might expect to find in the praise of this knighthood but is not discussed by Bernard is the importance of penitence in crusading ideology. The Templars and the Cistercians share a lot of similarities and "The military orders were generated by the same movement to reform the religious life as that which gave birth to Cistercians . . . and the prevailing mood in them was penitential" (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 35). While Jonathan Riley-Smith states that "the idea of the summons to take the cross as God's own test of an individual put it on a different plane from those feats of knightly endurance in fiction that appealed so much to contemporaries" (*The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 23) he does not specify the reason. Yet the knightly endurance in some of the fictional works is not that different to crusading ethos at all.

[28] While theologians had qualms about explaining mankind's relationship to God, everyday images were used to educate people on the meaning of loving God, with Christ as king being one such image (Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love" 181).

and save the oppressed.[29] One of the key arguments in this treatise is that killing for Christ is praiseworthy. Crusaders express *caritas*, Christian love, by becoming literally followers of Christ (Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love" 178). It is by destroying Christ's enemies that the knight becomes God's minister and defender of Christians. One might feel Bernard's anxiety and embarrassment when he contends that pagans should not be slaughtered if there is another way to prevent them from harming Christians.[30] To use violence is an act of self-defence, Bernard says, so that the Holy City will return to the rightful owner.[31] Once the battle is initiated, the knights, driven by religious fervour and righteous fury, set aside their deliberation, prudence, and calmness, charge at the enemy "as ruthless barbarians or as awesome hordes" (47). However, the victory in war depends solely on God, rather than on number or prowess.[32] Central to this section is the justification of violence. As Jonathan Riley-Smith suggests, both love of God and love of one's neighbours were touched on by apologists for the crusades. Crusading expresses fraternal love, relieving the Christians in the east. This love is highly problematic. According to Christian teaching, love should be shown to enemies as well. This love, however, is one-sided, yet mainstream theology

[29] This idea echoes that of Urban II, who urges crusaders to liberate Christians from heathen tyranny. However, Urban's aim is defensive, and he does not seek to convert Muslims, while "it is understandable that popular ideas sometimes transgressed these limits" (Erdmann 349).

[30] Compare Bernard's attitude with that of Francisco de Vitoria, who, referring to Deuteronomy 20:10-14, claims "in wars against the infidel . . . peace can never be hoped for on any terms; therefore the only remedy is to eliminate all of them who are capable of bearing arms against us, given that they are already guilty" (noted by Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536* 15).

[31] John R. Sommerfeldt argues that as can be seen from several of his correspondences, for Bernard "warfare is sometimes necessary and, thus, can be justified. His critical concern in justifying armed action is the motivation for that action" (570).

[32] While the crusaders were convinced they fought in a holy war and that they would gain spiritual benefits, they were nonetheless worried about their souls and whether God would help them in battle. Therefore "rather than disappearing as a superfluous factor in the conduct of crusade campaigns, religion continued to play a significant role in maintaining army morale, cohesion, and discipline" (Bachrach 150).

tended to justify this issue in an awkward way.[33] According to Christopher Tyerman, although rulers were questioned whether they would qualify as crusaders "in wishing to recreate a heroic, pristine unencumbered form of crusading" under the influence of "the myths of crusade literature and revivalist rhetoric" (*The Debate on the Crusades* 21), pacifism was a rare case. Although it took some time for using violence to approach Jerusalem to be justified and for the crusade and pilgrimage to become truly inseparable, with the legal distinction between "pilgrimage" and "crusade" remaining intact,[34] it was finally the case. The Cistercians, as represented by Bernard, see no problem with preaching crusades, and even the mendicant orders' doctrine of the abandonment of materialism and the renunciation of the world did not extend to crusades, with those advocating pacifism being only the minor sects: Waldensian heretics and Cathars (*The Debate on the Crusades* 21).[35]

Erdmann, the exemplar of early-middle twentieth century crusade scholars, believes that "the Christian warfare of the crusades was no sudden

[33] Peter Lombard finds a way out in saying that on the scale of fraternal love, love of one's enemies comes last. And St. Augustine developed the theory of just violence that violence should be imposed to make the offenders happy. Those who are punished suffer injuries only from their sins, not the punishment itself. What really matters is the intention, and one should be careful with using force (185). After all, force is better than indulgence, and like loving parents correcting their children, the users of violence express their love in the process. As Riley-Smith suggests, Augustine's pessimism that the number of people to be restrained by fear is larger than those to be restrained by love was grafted to common notions of free will and value placed on works in the later Middle Ages, and as has been argued by Anselm of Lucca, Ivo of Chartres, and Gratian, Christian *patientia* is not in total contradiction with fighting ("Crusading as an Act of Love" 187–88). Christ himself forced St. Paul to righteousness. While the propagandists may well be aware of the complexities within the dilemma between violence and peace, love and punishment, their one-sided view of love appeals to family love and hatred of infidels that was common at that time ("Crusading as an Act of Love" 190–91). The crusades as signs of Christian love come from the same roots as the charity of St. Francis (192), but they have totally different manifestations of the same ideal.

[34] According to Christopher Tyerman, the fusion of these two concepts took place over the course of a few hundred years. For details, see *The Debate on the Crusades* 22–23.

[35] As Bainton notes, the Franciscans' criticism of the crusades verged on pacifism, with the Franciscan Tertiaries demanding exemption from military service, although even St. Francis himself did not condemn the fifth crusade. In addition, while Wycliffe condemns war in principle, yet he concedes that war can be waged for just causes (119).

aberration, violence in the name of a good being as old as western European civilisation itself" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* 184) and that the crusading ethos was the consequence of the ideology of the church and the psychology of the militant aristocracy. Probably haunted by his experiences of the First World War and the Nazi regime, his work, disclosing the immense power of collective faith and the force of popular culture, is read as "a critique of the acceptance of militarist ideology by elites and society at large . . . 'a protest of the human spirit against fanaticism and aggression in any age'" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* 188). One might also ask to what extent the praise of crusades exemplifies ideological violence or *raisons d'état*? It is an extremely difficult question that may never be answered. From mankind's experience with the twentieth century we know the former answer is entirely possible. The traumatic events in the twentieth century might also explain why the military orders, referred to by Tyerman as "one of the most original, prominent, distinctive and adhesive consequences of the crusade" (*The Debate on the Crusades* 206), receive little attention before the mid-twentieth century. Probably "a function of unease at the overt institutionalisation of an apparent oxymoron of confessed religious dedicated to butchery" (*The Debate on the Crusades* 206) was, and probably still is, at work.

St. Bernard was not always persistent in advocating the crusading ideal, but highly involved in politics as "a sort of one-man European moral ombudsman and one of the instigators of the Second Crusade" (Tyerman, *God's War* 27–28), he often succumbed to circumstances and political concerns. In March 1147 he conceded to the Saxons' request to wage war against the pagans of the Baltic because "the abbot accepted that his powers of persuasion had reached their limits and that he had to adapt his message to suit each arena of war; alternatively he may have seen an opportunity to

extend the borders of Christianity" and he later confirmed that the Saxons would receive the remission of sins, just like crusaders (Phillips and Hoch 7). He was also an active player in rallying people to crusades. In 1144 Bernard claimed that "It is clearly the concern of Caesar to both succour his own crown and to defend the Church" (Phillips 22), seeking help from secular rulers by acknowledging their power. In fact, it was through Bernard, with his tour of the Rhineland and letter-writing campaign offering remission of sins and stressing the need to help Christians in the east that the pope persuaded Conrad and his people to crusade (Phillips 28). Likewise, Rudolf Hiestand notes that it was St. Bernard who changed Eugenius's call, widening the range of participants from the knightly class to the people at large and extending the location of operation from the Holy Land to other frontiers of Christendom (Hiestand 36–37).

Another great achievement of the Knights Templar is that they successfully redirected domestic violence beyond the realm of Christendom. The Knights Templar have influenced the whole world, Bernard exults, and he is more than happy to see "godless rogues, sacrilegious thieves, murderers, perjurers, and adulterers" (50) joining the cause of the Knights Templar. The author seems to believe that all the new recruits in the Crusade are also driven by religious zeal, but he is satisfied enough as long as their home countries get rid of them (51).

Crusade model sermons offer an interesting comparative study. While they do not necessarily record the actual deliveries of crusade propaganda, these sermons serve as reliable sources for the framework of crusade ideology. Interestingly, as Christoph T. Maier points out, the three key concepts in such sermons are "pilgrimage," "the sign of the cross," and "being in the service of Christ or God", with the first as the least frequently used and the latter two much more common (52). One should not be surprised at the lack of practical advice given in them because "It is necessary to keep in mind

that, by its very nature, preaching tends to focus on the devotional and moral aspects of life . . . the characterization of the crusade and the crusader . . . first and foremost tells us how their authors viewed crusading in terms of a devotional activity and with regard to its moral significance for the individual participant. In contrast, military, material or political aspects of crusading are less prominent features of these texts" (Maier 54). This statement could also be applied to Bernard's text as well as to treatises on the religious obligations of knights. In the crusade sermons the concept of the *imitatio Christi* "carried with it a number of associations which could be exploited individually or merged for the sake of combining different aspects of crusading in one concept and image" (Maier 59), including following Christ into battle, by experiencing Christ's love seeking a spiritual union with him, and finally, following Christ into death. This third aspect combines "the military, devotional and penitential aspects of crusading in an ideal way. Death on crusade was thus . . . the ultimate proof of one's devotion to Christ by imitating his act of dying for the sake of others" (Maier 61), an idea St. Bernard emphasises in his treatise. Although judged from the model sermons, "the hallmark of thirteenth and early fourteenth-century crusade preaching seems to have been a strong emphasis on the devotional and the penitential" (Maier 68), the latter element seems to be lacking in *De Laude*.

Christopher Tyerman in *God's War* points out that the messages conveyed by St. Paul's military metaphors, which are borrowed by St. Bernard in his treatise, are a complete misreading of the latter's meaning. St. Paul encourages his fellow Christians to "stand against the deceits of the devil . . . not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places" (Ephesians 6:11-12); he also commands that "No man, being a soldier to God, entangleth himself with secular businesses" (II Timothy 2:4);

he further confirms the spiritual nature of the war and its means in that “we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (II Corinthians 10:3-4). After examining cases of what he sees as utter distortions of biblical texts, Tyerman laments that St. Paul’s successors, including St. Bernard, adopt the metaphorical language of warfare found in the Pauline epistles, and deploy it to make the originally very moral and theological case “a measure of [their] pragmatism, sophistication (some might say sophistry) and sheer intellectual ingenuity . . . over the following millennium in expounding the doctrine of the Gospels that there was an ideology of Christian holy war at all” (*God’s War* 28).

While for Tyerman pilgrimage turned out to be the most influential legacy of the Christian occupation of Jerusalem (*God’s War* 251), he nevertheless acknowledges that images, language and ideology specifically related to penitential holy war were a significant part of a wider articulation of holy war and militant Christianity. Even when the importance of penitential warfare is not foregrounded in Bernard’s treatise, it is always in its intellectual backdrop, because being a member of the military orders is choosing “a lifetime vocation, not a temporary act of penance” (Tyerman, *God’s War* 257), and thus Templars are not crusaders in the ordinary sense.

The acceptance of the use of force as a legitimate means of securing highly circumscribed political ends during the last few decades has perhaps made the crusades more comprehensible. It has become easier to accept the crusaders for what they actually were, and we, without necessarily endorsing what they did, can begin to understand why some of the greatest figures in Christian history were fervently on their side, and why numerous people at that time were willing to make huge sacrifices for a cause considered just and salvational.

About this short treatise a few summarizing remarks remain to be made.

In Bernard's vision, the Knights Templar's imitation of Christ takes two seemingly very different forms: using violence and ascetic acts. The former, which is the more prominent of the two in the work, is justified through the tradition of just wars, especially in crusading contexts. Bernard's ideal knight is someone who can switch himself between an obedient gentleman and a fierce warrior (the latter version is more prominent), yet he does not give any practical advice as to how this status can be achieved. His image of knighthood is idealized but impractical. This ideal later became the Knights Templar's weakness, as M. C. Barber argues,[36] and in this case "ideology and substance . . . [could not] be expected to be [exactly matched]" (46). Similarly, it has been suggested that "Bernard's definitions were based on his dogmatic approach to the topic and represented an utopian vision . . . incompatible with the conditions of real life . . . Even the Templars . . . were not able to implement these ideas, deserving in their turn the criticism of the chroniclers of the Second Crusade" (Grabois, "Militia and Malitia" 54). Neither was the new combination of religious life and fighting altogether accepted without questioning, though. The argument that war leads to hatred and greed was used to criticize the Templars' "illicit and pernicious" behaviour (Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love" 183). In addition, Marie Luise Bulst-Thiele explains the psychological reasons behind the fall of the Templars thus: "The contradictions inherent in the Templars' credo of piety and war could not be resolved. Not all Templars were pious and peaceful men. The constant struggle with a bitter enemy did not breed kindness and gentleness. Furthermore, their unique role as monks and warriors made them arrogant" (63). The ideal of imitating Christ as holy warriors must inevitably fail, even for their most fervent proponents.

[36] He suggests that when lay aristocratic society found the Knights Templar short of their ideal, the reaction was hostile (46).

4.1.2 Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry*

Unlike St. Bernard, who prescribes chivalric behaviour so that knights could fit in his vision of an ideal society, Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry* comprises mainly practical advice for the Company of the Star during the crisis in the Hundred Year's War.[37] Although Charny went on crusade himself, in this treatise he does not privilege crusade but praises the merits to be gained in wars in general (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 47). Charny himself being "the very model of the sort of knighthood that Jean was attempting to promote when he founded the Company of the Star" (Boulton 186),[38] his perfect knights are not unkempt ascetic holy warriors, but conform to "the indices of chivalrous achievement that he suggests are external acts and the repute that has attached to them" (Keen 15). At the very beginning Charny categorizes different kinds of chivalric pursuits in accordance with the types of activities they participate in and evaluates them according to their scale. A good knight should always aim for greater secular achievement, and success in jousts, the first and the lowest in the degree of honour, might cause the participants to "enjoy it so much that they neglect and abandon the other pursuits of arms" (48). As a general rule, the greater the cost and risk some action involves, the more honour can be gained from it, and because tournaments require more "wealth, equipment and expenditure, physical hardship, crushing and wounding, and sometimes danger of death" (48), they bring winners more fame and honour than mere jousts. Real war brings even more honour than jousting or tournaments, and the author in stressing its importance remarks that engaging in war in one's own locality is only next to the service of God (49). Honour to be gained from war is subject to various factors, and the

[37] For an introduction to the Company of the Star, see Boulton 167-210.
[38] In the badge of the Company, the sun in a circle within the star was probably a symbol of Christ (Boulton 205).

men-at-arms who keep travelling may have fewer chances of encountering adventures than those who stay longer in a certain place and way. Yet the former, as long as he has the right intention and a successful outcome, cannot be said to be less worthy than the latter (51). In fact success seems to be the defining factor in the evaluation of worthiness, because for Charny no motive for performing feats of arms should be disparaged if the agent is successful. Fighting for love, and further for money, is praiseworthy. A knight, at first naïve, who performs chivalric deeds to win a lady's love and is encouraged by the latter to continue doing so, should be lauded. Mercenaries should also be praised as long as they are successful and do not quit the military profession (52–53). Charny cautions against excessive spending because there are some knights who have spent too much money so that they are forced to leave before good opportunities of chivalric feats emerge. Yet his focus is on the potential loss of chances to win more honour rather than the dubious place worldly wealth has in Christianity, and he concedes that if these men do perform honourable deeds, they should still be praised (54). In Charny's ideal chivalric world, every member has an obligation to uphold the honour system, and due honour should be given to those knights whose brave deeds are little known as long as they are not evil (55).[39] Throughout his entire discussion of chivalric pursuits the author keeps emphasizing the ultimate evaluative criterion of a knight's honour in the conclusions to each minor section: whoever does the best is the most worthy, while other factors, such as motivation, are all subordinate to this central criterion.

Then after outlining the ideal educational process of a knight from an

[39] Plundering, however, is not considered evil, but the profit gained in the process is usually regarded as a sign of the practitioner's efforts and courage. This attitude towards plundering is widely shared in the medieval period. For justification for plundering, see Pizan's discussion of booty and ransom in her *Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry* (Caxton's *Feats of Arms*) (166–79), which she copied from *Tree of Battles*.

infant to someone proficient in the art of war and arguing that a valiant lord and good knights support each other and both parties gain more honour and renown as a result (55–60), Charny gives some advice to the men-at-arms on how to learn from the established knights. The grim reality of the knightly profession surfaces from the attractive promises of fame and renown for the successful: all "great achievements and honourable deeds of prowess and of valor . . . [are accomplished] through suffering great hardship, making strenuous efforts, and enduring fearful physical perils and the loss of friends whose deaths they have witnessed in many great battles" (61). However, for Charny, suffering is mostly a physical reality, a necessity to be accepted on one's journey to secular honour, and he does not highlight its religious significance as a means of participating in Christ's Passion and imitating him. Apart from the generic requirement of submitting oneself to God's will, the author gives specific and moderate instructions on catering choices. Good food and wine make a knight weak and reluctant to risk death, but that does not mean he should absolutely keep himself away from these things. On the contrary, a knight should enjoy good food and wine but not become addicted. Moderation is the key and too much discomfort in life is not advisable (61).[40] In the same vein, games such as dice and real tennis should be left "to rakes, bawds, and tavern rogues" (62). Yet Charny is fully aware that in reality gambling cannot be eliminated, and he soon makes a concession and says if one must play dice then he should not aim to win too much or use too much money (62). Charny is not a strict moralist, but his view is "a thoroughly humane one, and attractive for that reason" (Keen 13). However, in a later passage Charny once again explains at greater length that good knights should refrain from nice food, drink and clothing and not fear discomfort so

[40] This is in stark contrast with Bernard's advice.

that they can better prepare themselves to seek honour (68–70). Despite the inconsistencies in Charny's text, it is clear that the discrepancies between ideal and reality are truly unavoidable.

Speaking of chivalric virtues, later in his discussion of the scale of qualities and not following an easily visible logical order, Charny lists the following: simplicity of heart, generosity and devotion, loving, serving and honouring God and the Virgin, overly subtle intelligence versus true wisdom, courage, and good counsel. In line with Charny's "whoever does more is worthier" philosophy, all these qualities that he finally concludes a good knight should have in their entirety, are good in themselves, but one can always aim at more. Simplicity is almost naivety, which prevents people from committing sins, but "there may be greater virtues in some than are to be found in these aforementioned people" (80). Generosity might conceal greed or envy, and intelligence is not good when combined with evil intentions (81). Prudence is usually seen as essential for a successful knight, so it might be surprising to see Charny call reckless men worthy if they achieve impressive deeds of arms and declare that "too much good sense is not right for young men at the beginning of their career in arms" (82). Passivity is inferior to agency, and while those who obey others' orders and perform great deeds are doubtless praiseworthy, those who command others are considered of greater merit (82). It is also interesting to examine the *exempla* Charny uses and the way he interprets them. Samson and Solomon misuse their strength and intelligence, both sending a warning message to the knights (86), but we see very little trace of the usual religious interpretations of their stories. The story of St. Peter's three denials of Christ presumably stresses the importance of repentance for the reader, but Charny instead reads it in a different way, neglecting the penitential element and remarking that "it would be a great thing for men of worth, if they could be as steadfast in the faith of Our Lord as

was this holy man of worth" (87). This comment is puzzling. It could be that Charny sees the fallibility of such a great man as Peter and believes it might be too much to ask of ordinary knights to preoccupy themselves with penance. Whatever the author is suggesting here, he seems not to be insistent on the performance of penance as an imperative element in the knightly career. Caesar's death teaches knights a lesson of paying too little gratitude to God, by whom his deeds are achieved. Yet this gratitude is still to be paid in this world, and Charny by no means suggests that one should give up worldly honour and focus on the next life. Far from it, for Charny argues for divine sanction for secular fame so that if someone achieves great deeds, God will make sure they are talked about and made widely known (88). While it might be impossible to find an embodiment of all these virtues in this world, Judas Maccabeus is a perfect knight, who

> was wise in all his deeds, he was a man of worth who led a holy life, he was strong, skillful, and unrelenting in effort and endurance; he was handsome above all others, and without arrogance; he was full of prowess, bold, valiant, and a great fighter, taking part in the finest, greatest, and fiercest battles and the most perilous adventures there ever were, and in the end he died in a holy way in battle, like a saint in paradise. (88)

One can easily notice that apart from the generic "a holy life" and passing references to endurance and patience, which are applicable in both religious and military contexts, all the other virtues are related to martial prowess.

In the last section of Charny's treatise, he first diverts from his central argument and discusses the order of marriage, the monastic orders, and the order of priesthood, all of which are similar to the order of knighthood in a certain way. Offering advice for getting married, once again he cautions against the corruption caused by seeking wealth for its own sake, a lesson

applicable beyond the chivalric order. People should get married because of love rather than riches, or they do so in order to keep them from sins. Only those who conduct themselves properly in marriage can live joyfully and pleasantly. Charny does not require anything from the knights except adhering to the rules of romantic courtly love and marriage, and abstinence, which in other contexts might be regarded as more commendable than marriage, is not expected.[41] The rules of monastic orders are somewhat similar to that of knighthood in that the initiation into both is preferred at childhood. Of the three groups of people who enter monastic orders, the children, the adults, and the old, Charny considers the first group as most inclined to adhere to the rigorous monastic rules, because a child "has no knowledge of sin nor of the world" (173). Instead of emphasizing the importance of penance, Charny has little faith in the human capability of transformation, and, perhaps following common sense, he states that those who enter the orders after committing dishonourable deeds are sometimes insincere and reluctant to follow the rules, so that it would be better if they had been rejected in the first place (presumably Charny holds similar views as to the order of chivalry). The old people enter the orders because they "are no longer capable of striving in this world, and they leave it . . . so that they can end their days in a more salutary manner" (173). For Charny, it is the necessities of old age that compel old people to become monks and live a more spiritual life: voluntary renunciation of the world, which is chosen by Galahad and Conscience among others, is not seen as an option.[42] With practical concerns in mind, Charny argues that the order of priesthood, "the worthiest of all" (94), should not accept candidates that are too young. Instead

[41] Compare the tree Will sees.
[42] Compare Llull's old knight who leaves the order of chivalry because it has become difficult for him to maintain his honour in old age.

priests should fully learn their service before taking office and afterwards perform their duties in a proper manner.

Then Charny returns to the order of knighthood. Highlighting the virtue of knightly endurance, he claims that the discomfort one feels in monastic orders or orders of priesthood is nothing when compared with the hardships one is likely to face in the order of knighthood, which involves life-threatening dangers. The author's pride in the order of knighthood is most manifest when he declares that other orders cannot endure as much. It is worth noticing that here Charny seems to have retracted his previous statement and argues that God's grace and salvation of the soul are more important goals than glory in this world, but such goals are only attainable by performing deeds of arms (96), in actuality repeating his previous arguments. There then follows a list of crimes that evil knights commit: highway robbery, murder, plundering (presumably here he is referring to domestic plundering, for he has justified previously taking booty in battle), and pillaging the church. The hardships in performing deeds of arms equally apply to these people, but their reward is eternal damnation. Endurance alone without the right intention does not bring forth salvation.

Charny's argument for the superiority of the order of chivalry continues with a lengthy comparison between knights and priests. He is not a pacifist, suggesting that use of violence is not a taboo for the priests, but if they live pure and saintly lives, when it is necessary even they can take up arms and feel secured. The knights, on the other hand, because they are exposed to constant danger, "they should be of as great or even greater integrity than might be required of a priest" (98).[43] In this section Charny seems to have placed more emphasis on penance. Before going to battle, knights should put

[43] This argument offers an interesting comparison with Bernard's claim that the Knights Templar are more important than monks.

on God's armour "in true and pure devoutness, having confessed all their sins and repented of them" (98) and pray for God's help in danger, a series of actions all the more necessary because of the substantial danger knights face once again underlined by Charny. Everything a knight treasures is at risk on the battlefield, where they encounter those who "come there to kill, disinherit, or dishonour them, if they can, and to take everything from them if they have the power" (99). Despite the daunting risks fighting involves, knights should not fear death but instead get ready for it, because their pursuits are "so prized, praised, and honoured that one can say in all certainty that of all the conditions of this world, it is the one above all others in which one would be required to live with the constant thought of facing death at any hour on any day" (99). However, unlike Bernard's fervent crusaders, death is not a goal in itself and should be avoided if possible. The relationship between knights and God is somewhat mercantile, in which worldly gains are expected rewards in exchange of devotion. Knights should devote their way of life to God and the Virgin so that they will be comforted and saved from death (100). Even robbers, murderers, and traitors give something in return to the people who have done them favour, so knights should make more efforts to serve God and Mary, who bestow their gifts on them and can take them away equally freely. In addition, Charny compares God's favour as a loan (101), and "just as [evil knights] forget God . . . so God too will forget them" (101). It is amusing to see that following the section on devotion to God and the Virgin Charny starts a critique of the bad dress code he observes among fellow knights, which seems rather odd in its context. The extravagant adornments make knights neglect honour, but greater negative impact is found on the practical level, because the corsets make it very difficult for knights to wear armour for a long time and move agilely (102). Yet, as with his former remarks about food and drink, Charny admits that there is nothing wrong if young men are "dressed

decently, neatly, elegantly, with due restraint and with attractive things of low cost and often replaced; for it is right that people should behave" each according to their years if they do not neglect to do honourable deeds (103).[44] Once again, the ends justify the means. In his final remarks, Charny reinforces his argument of God rewarding knights with worldly honour by comparing the former to a spring that quenches all good desires, a source accessible to whoever performs worthy deeds. In addition, length of life is ordained by God, so there is actually no risk involved in fighting.

In conclusion, in Charny's treatise the author keeps stressing the performance of great deeds of arms as the ultimate criterion for worthiness, which in turn receives the divine reward of secular fame and glory. In many respects Charny's treatise is similar to Bernard's, including advice on food, clothing, and wealth, as well as claiming that knights are able to do what clerics cannot, but their tones and focuses are entirely different. Charny displays no manifest interest in asceticism and self-denial, which Bernard regards as core elements in knighthood, but he is well aware of human limits and weaknesses. As a consequence he is willing to make concessions: knights will definitely fall short of the ideals, but as long as they continue to perform worthier deeds of arms than they have done and do not become overly indulgent in worldly pleasures, they should not be censured. Charny's knights must excel in military prowess and courage in seeking greater worldly fame and glory, but Bernard's holy warriors, apart from having necessary fighting skills, must fight as a form of penance for the sake of God's glory and their blissful afterlife. On a final note, because very little primary historical evidence has remained which allows us to know what was actually accomplished by monarchical military orders in general, it is difficult to tell

[44] Also compare Bernard on knights' dress code.

whether Charny's treatise was put into practice (Boulton xxi), although Keen believes that Charny "offers us a model of the chivalrous man which we ought to be able to recognize from real life" (18). One thing definitely certain is that Charny's intention was for French knights to act according to the rules stipulated in his work.

4.1.3 *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*

Chivalric manuals written in the fifteenth century, as Maurice Keen argues, do not add much to theories of knighthood (15). In a survey of military manuals in fifteenth-century England, Diane Bornstein is also supportive of this view. The main source for these manuals was Vegetius's *De re militari* written in the fourth century (Bornstein 469). Of all the manuals she surveys, one is a translation of Vegetius commissioned by Thomas, Lord Berkeley (470), *Knyghthode and Bataile* is a paraphrase of Vegetius (472), *Boke of Noblesse* is a piece of political propaganda, and Pizan's *Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie*, which Caxton translated as the *Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyvalrye*, consists of materials from Vegetius, Valerius Maximus, and Honoré Bonet (475). Scholars are already well aware of "the impact, or sometimes lack of impact, of technological change upon cultural representations of knighthood in the Middle Ages" (Taylor xi), and this is a question that has not been adequately addressed so far and I also do not attempt to answer it here. In terms of cultural value, another chivalric manual also translated by Caxton is superior. Often cited as "the quintessential statement of medieval Christian chivalric ideals" (Johnston 357), Ramon Llull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* is almost as orthodox a text as one can find when defining the proper chivalric behaviour.[45] As Maurice Keen suggests, this somewhat "ecclesiastically oriented work" was the classic account of knighthood in Western Europe with the exception of Germany (11).[46] There is no questioning the work's popularity: soon after Ramon had written the *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, it was circulating in Castilian, Catalan, French and Latin. Caxton chose as his source a more common French text among several

[45] For a brief introduction to Llull's life and work, see Duran.

[46] Keen also notes that the *Book of the Order of Chivalry* was translated into French, Castilian, Middle Scots, and there were three French editions in the early sixteenth century (11).

available to him, and Edward IV owned another French version, which he purchased from Bruges in the 1470s and 1480s (Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 118).[47] In the epilogue to Caxton's translation, he first condemns the immoral behaviour of English knights in his own day, and then he urges them to read Froissart and Malory, the Lancelot trilogy in particular, suggesting that they will find fine examples of ideal knighthood in some English kings and nobles, before finally dedicating the translation to Richard III.[48] Caxton's translation will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. At this point it suffices to say that because his translation of the *Book* does not contain significant changes to the original, I will base my survey on Llull's original work.

The prologue to the work resembles a piece of chivalric romance. There is an old knight who "had long upheld the Order of Chivalry with the nobility and strength of his lofty courage . . . in tournament, in assaults and in battles" (35), but who when the end of his life approaches "forsook his estates . . . shunned the world so that the frailty of his body, which had been brought about by old age, would not dishonour him in those things where wisdom and good fortune had for so long held him in honour" (35). Although the old knight is later said to be thinking about the world to come and the judgements he is about to face, the primary reason for his withdrawal from this world is his physical condition.[49] The old knight's direct motivation in becoming a hermit is not to seek spiritual wisdom or to repent for his sins, but to keep his honour that has been won with great difficulty from military pursuits. In this aspect the old knight-hermit differs

[47] For a brief outline of Caxton's career, see "Richard III's Books", 110-8.

[48] "It is impossible to read it without being moved to enthusiasm, while at the same time realising that its ideals have been mostly ignored. Caxton was certainly so carried away by it that he wrote an equally stirring epilogue which is one of his most admired piece of writing" (Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 122). While it cannot be known whether Richard read his presentation copy or not, it is quite certain the king did read this essential text at some point (Sutton and Visser-Fuchs 123).

[49] Charny holds a similar view.

significantly from those we see in the works examined earlier in this thesis, for both Lancelot and Conscience little resemble knights after they have made the decision to renounce the world, but the old hermit is still partly attached to his former glories and his renunciation is based on more practical grounds. The squire who is to receive the book does it in the way knights embark on quests in chivalric romances – he falls asleep when riding a horse on the way to be dubbed, and the uncontrolled horse ambles at will until it stops near the old knight. The squire's sleep should be understood as bearing allegorical meanings. He is not only a knight-to-be, but an everyman of all future knights and those who are already dubbed. In his sleep his horse leaves the right road, just as the old knight sees that the whole group of the knights in his time are in grave danger of having lost the true path. For when the squire hears the name of the Order of Chivalry and enquires its meaning, the old knight rebukes his ignorance angrily: "How can you not know, son . . . what the Rule and Order of Chivalry is? And how can you seek knighthood if you do not know what the Order of Chivalry is?"(37). To teach the squire the true meaning of the Order and its requirements, the old knight gives him what is said to be the following book, which the squire takes to the king holding the dubbing ceremony.

Llull's frankness in acknowledging the necessity of violence is worth highlighting. In accordance with the tradition of the righteous use of force, he makes it very clear that knights are a highly selective group and they are justice's instrument to restore order with fear. To benefit the whole world, love alone cannot succeed. In fact, "love and fear are joined as one against enmity and contempt, and thus the knight . . . because of his horse and arms, must be loved and feared by the people. For . . . through fear, truth and justice shall be restored" (41). Then his view changes a little bit in emphasizing that contrary to clerics who "can learn and be inspired to love" (42) the knights' primary task is to "incline the people to fear and they will in turn be afraid of committing

offences against each other" (42). The mutual support of clerics and knights is further illustrated at a later passage. God creates Orders of Clergy and Chivalry, "two close offices"(45) to serve him, Llull argues, and thus "the greatest friendship that there can be in this order should be between cleric and knight" (45). At this point knights and clerics seem to be on a par with each other.

Llull is well aware that there is something in the military profession that is in conflict with Christian teaching at a very deep level, so his instruction on the way the squire receives knighthood is that he should remember such things as the fourteen articles, Ten Commandments, and seven sacraments that he can "reconcile the office of knighthood with the things that pertain to the Holy Catholic Faith" (63). The priest who teaches the new knight such things is later referred to as a "spiritual knight" (65). It is in the section in which Llull discusses the allegorical meanings of the knight's arms that he finally declares that "the knight, whose office, after that of the cleric, is the highest office that there is" (67). Llull at the very end of his treatise also explains the reason why it is so brief, for he needs to write a book about the Order of the Clergy. Whether he, contrary to his previous arguments, is reaffirming clergy's superiority, is open to debate.

Another aspect in Llull's work that is incompatible with the ascetic ideal is the necessity of wealth. Although the penitential old knight has "a full beard, long hair, and was wearing tattered old clothes" (36), for knights who are still in the profession poverty should be avoided. Instead, on several occasions Llull points out wealth is indispensable to knights, and in the real world the ideal of voluntary poverty is a rather incongruous sight among the grandeur of chivalry. Poverty leads to crime, and a squire "who has no armour or does not possess sufficient wealth to be able to uphold Chivalry cannot be a knight, for because of lack of a harness and wealth the bad knight becomes a robber, a traitor, a

thief, a liar, a sham and succumbs to other vices" (60). One needs great wealth to become a knight indeed. The bardings protecting the horse are also compared to a knight's possessions and riches, and without such temporal possessions he cannot uphold his honour and protect himself from evil thoughts, because "poverty causes deceits and betrayals to be contrived" (69). To honour the Order of Chivalry, it is once again asserted that virtuous qualities alone are not enough, and "it behoves the knight to speak with fine words, wear fine clothes and have a fine harness and a grand household" (78), all necessities to the Order.

I hope this brief discussion is sufficient to shed some light on how far removed from the ideal we see in works such as *Piers Plowman* a real (albeit only former) knight like Llull can be, who on the other hand attributes allegorical meanings to every piece of equipment a knight owns. In the real world a knight must resort to violence and deal with the concrete financial issues that his profession inevitably entails. The "winning by losing" logic that Christ exemplifies does not work, the call for passive and patient suffering is only a faint and distant voice, and the author does not even consider the possibility of a knight choosing voluntary poverty. Unlike Conscience and the Grail knights, seeking spiritual wisdom is not a task appropriate for knights. They are to learn, remember and practice religious teachings, not to make enquiries themselves. Despite being deeply Christian, Llull's work is "so remarkably free of priestly overtones, so humane and in many ways so secular in its outlines. There can be little doubt that in this respect it was in tune with the general attitude of knightly circles" (Keen 11).

In conclusion, in none of the three chivalric manuals examined here does the passive ideal of the imitation of Christ as one sees in the Grail stories and *Piers Plowman* have a strong presence. The ecclesiastical voice and crusading spirit represented by Bernard maintain that destroying heathens is

imitating Christ, while the other two treatises not only frankly acknowledge the necessity of violence but also place great value on wealth and bodily pleasures. Considering the popularity and influence of these chivalric manuals, it is reasonable to surmise that the passive way of imitating Christ does not feature significantly in chivalric manuals in general.

4.2 Christine de Pizan: Kings and Knights in a Body Politic

Experts on medieval kingship and knighthood seem to reach the consensus that despite sometimes having conflicting interests, the affinity between kings and knights is not an illusion literature creates and readers, including ourselves, mindlessly absorb. In fact, kings are proud to present themselves as knights (an eagerness doubtlessly bolstered by chivalric literature and other forms of cultural products), and knights might also wield certain non-military powers which kings are sometimes keen on wresting from them.[50] The same rule applies to lesser aristocrats as well, and the entire aristocratic class can be seen as scattered along a spectrum of chivalry, with emperors and kings on the one end and ordinary knights on the other, all bound by the same set of rules, but different in the extent to which such rules are obeyed. To further justify the choice of looking at Caxton's dedications to his patrons, who are usually kings or noblemen of the highest category, in the examination of ideals of chivalry, it seems only right to look at relevant parts of a representative text expounding the relationship between kings and knights. We find a fine example in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Body Politic*, one of her less read works and a rare specimen of the women's voice in a field that was in most cases dominated by men.[51]

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[50] Scholars have argued that knights are not pure military groups, but they have administrative functions as well. Richard Kaeuper, for example, suggests that while "over time, kings came to consider themselves as members of the knighthood . . . the warriors considered themselves at least kinglets within their own territorial spheres" (*Medieval Chivalry* 235–36), and sometimes their interests came into conflict. Similarly, David Crouch argues that since the twelfth century chivalric ideals gave the wealthy and powerful "a code by which they could recognise themselves" (1), but he further points out that although the medieval aristocracy pursued chivalric ideals along with wealth and power, the two pursuits sometimes lead in different directions, with a knight's ambitions and objects conflicting with those of his lord.

[51] Barry Collett suggests that there are three kinds of "mirrors for princes" based on their different ways to answer what the best way of exercising power is: the first emphasizes the rulers' morality, represented by Giles of Rome; the second derives from the practical advice about personal habits and advisors the first kind offer; the third discusses how a good body politic operates (1). He also argues that because turbulent social conditions in

When Henry IV's rebellion against Richard II and the ensuing civil war still remained fresh in the memory of the English people, across the English Channel France did not fare much better—when Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the Body Politic* the latter was plagued by inner strife and schism, which finally culminated in a civil war.[52] It is therefore understandable that in the author's vision of an ideal society the ancient moral allegory of body members in discord is invoked in order to stress the importance of a harmonious society led by the prince symbolized as the head, with the other members of the body politic trying to make their own contributions as well. Written to benefit the Dauphin, Louis of Guyenne, Christine's treatise expresses ideas that are authoritative if not conservative.[53] Besides, the main sources she uses, whether acknowledged or not, include John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, authors of the two most widely-read medieval "mirrors for princes."[54] Therefore by examining how the author views the relationship between kings and knights in a context that is not purely military, we might

the fourteenth century made mere moral advice insufficient, the other two emphases became more popular (4). Because the focus of this thesis is the chivalric ideal, the mirror examined here belongs to the first type. Yet it should be pointed out that even though Christine appeals to all estates' moral standards she nonetheless includes a large number of pieces of practical advice. In addition, the boundaries between chivalric manuals and mirrors for princes are in fact blurred, and Collett calls Christine's *Book of Feats of Arms*, which in this thesis is referred to as a chivalric manual, a mirror (16). For a brief survey of the history of the idea of the body politic until the Lancastrian period, see Perkins 126–29.

[52] For more on the work's historical context, see the introduction of *The Book of the Body Politic* edited by Kate Langdon Forhan, especially pages xiii-xvi.

[53] Some critics, including Sheila Delany, regard this work as "wholly unoriginal and retrograde on its own terms, a mere regurgitation of 'male-stream' political ideas that justify a politics of subordination-and-rule" (noted by Nederman 20). On the other hand, Cary J. Nederman suggests Christine and Nicole Oresme use the corporeal analogy to express equality rather than "a single monotonous point about hierarchy and subordination" expressed with "a static and lifeless metaphor" (32), which shows the ways this image is open to interpretation, as is the ideal of imitating Christ. The idea of the body/society analogy was also used by Egidio Colonna, Philippe de Mézières, and Gerson (Willard, *Christine de Pizan* 177–78).

[54] Finke discusses how Pizan's version of the metaphor, a shift from an earlier religious understanding of social structure to a secular one, is simpler and more schematic than John of Salisbury's original version (32–33).

gain a better understanding of how their relationship was perceived in the period.[55]

Briefly speaking, Christine's division of society is as follows: the prince is the head issuing commands to the rest; the knights and nobles defend the prince's law from harmful and useless things; the rest of the estates form the supportive belly, legs, and feet. A good education is the key to the upbringing of the young prince, and among the first things to be learned from a wise tutor is the love of God, literacy in Latin, and the ability to make moral judgments. Yet when he grows old enough "then he ought to be separated from the women who have cared for him and his care ought to be entrusted principally to one older knight of great authority" (8). In addition to making sure the child engages in religious practices properly and develops social skills, it is the responsibility of the knight to teach him the honour and valour of knighthood, skills in battle, the right occasion for violence, the use of arms, and how to attract honourable people and maintain a worthy entourage. Christine then suggests that the child should learn other things such as the practical details of government, foreign diplomacy, and religious commandments. He even needs to learn from the commoners "so that his understanding is not found ignorant of anything that can be virtuously known" (10). Among all the things a prince needs to learn, chivalric behaviour plays a prominent role.

After arguing that the prince's three main tasks are loving God, loving his people, and maintaining justice, Christine continues to discuss a wide range of topics, including the right occasion to raise more tax, generosity, mercy and

[55] Finke suggests that fifteenth-century Christine translations, including *Body Politic* and *Feats of Arms*, the latter of which mainly discusses tactics and international law, define a new hegemonic masculinity that primarily depends on rhetorical skills rather than military prowess. While I do not think the conclusion can be drawn from *Feats of Arms*, her argument from a feminist point of view that Pizan's humility topos and promise to write in simple language are in fact efforts to undermine, or make a joke at the expense of, the military culture exclusive to men, is worth noting here (35).

patience, an abstinent way of life, the role of fortune, the choice of counsel, and astrology. It is worth noting that although Christine is alert to and anxious about the imminent threats to domestic stability, she is by no means a pacifist. When discussing the proper things for the prince's good living, the author, stressing the importance of diligence and using Roman *exempla*, declares that "the business and care caused by war is sometimes profitable to the morals of the young" (49). In the next section, Christine firmly praises the Roman triumph as something Christian princes, especially the French monarchs, should adopt, which rewards the knights, the worthy men "of integrity, experienced in arms, noble in manners and condition, loyal in deed and in courage, wise in government and diligent in chivalrous pursuits"(50).

From the above we could see that according to Christine's vision of the ideal society the military aspect of knighthood is an essential part of kingship. The prince learns practices in war in his youth, should see war as a wholesome occupation, and needs to reward those who have demonstrated their chivalric prowess in battle.[56] What might seem strange is that Christine does not explicitly state that the prince should be an exemplary performer of feats of arms, but we could assume the message is implied. Near the end of the part on kingship, Christine affirms that if a prince manages to act as outlined in her work, "there would be songs of glory and praise" (56) which would be ample proof for his perfection. Of course the author does not forget to mention that a good prince who wants to both enter heaven and gain praise from all people "will love God and fear God above everything" (56). Yet this note of humility before the divinity is soon balanced by the concluding remarks of Part I, which contains Valerius's story of Julius Caesar, the ultimate

[56] As is noted by Charity Cannon Willard, Christine expresses the same opinion in her Ballade 2, calling good knights "Digne d'estre de lorier couronné" ("Christine de Pizan on the Art of Warfare" 3).

incarnation of worldly virtues. The Romans without the Christian faith, Christine says, believed "that such virtue in a man could not perish in leaving life, and his soul ascended to heaven, deified" (57). It might be far too great an exaggeration to say that Christine here is hinting at everlasting glory beyond Christianity,[57] but at least in her version of an ideal society the secular is as powerful as the religious, and the chivalric life seems incompatible with renouncing the world. The issue of two contrasting value systems is addressed more fully in Christine's *L'advision*, in which Dame Philosophie's assurance of the worldly benefits of the desire for wisdom is followed by "a barrage of quotations from patristic and medieval theological sources that convey the idea of the denial of earthly plenitude as a necessary factor in achieving a place in heaven" (Birk 103). The juxtapositions between the earthly and heavenly, appreciation and negation of secular life, and tones of suffering and delight, suggest the dilemmas Christine faces. Birk argues that Christine's purpose in raising this ambiguity is to provide multiple layers of meaning and to "signal her desire to intentionally create—or perhaps simply acknowledge—a sense of uncertainty in the theological realm" (105). Such ambivalence is not spotted in *The Book of the Body Politic*, in which the author declares that what is most important is to love, fear, and serve God "with good deeds rather than spending time withdrawn in long prayers" (11). The young prince in the next chapter of this quotation is asked to remember the transience of worldly things, but this does not equate with the rejection of the world.

So far Christine has examined how an ideal king should fulfill his duties as a good knight and the reward he would get in the process. In the next part

[57] Tsae Lan Lee Dow maintains that Christine's "construction of the body politic does not grant the person of the prince himself a divinely sanctioned status . . . In this construction the body natural *is* the body politic" (231–32).

"On Knights and Nobles," which is much shorter, she goes on to discuss the ideal behaviour of knights as arms and hands of the body politic.[58] Their role in defending the people is underlined in particular besides being virtuous and having good manners. What is appropriate for the prince to do, Christine argues, might not suit the knight due to differences in status, but when it comes to the more abstract aspects of morality "there is no doubt that one can speak the same to nobles as to princes when it concerns the aforementioned virtues" (58). In fact, having recapitulated her advice at the beginning of Part II, the author declares that people from all the three estates should have all these virtues and to talk about specifically knightly virtues would be redundant. Yet soon afterwards when Christine recommends that everyone live according to God's order, she seems to forget the three-fold division of the body politic and the whole society is divided into two parts: nobles and the populace. The knights/nobles and the kings belong to the same category in a cruder division of society.

As with the first part, Christine begins with the education of the young, which is similar to that in the chivalric manuals already examined. Young knights, she explains, should be trained to endure hardship: their food and clothing must not be too good, and other forms of bodily comfort are also detrimental to a successful chivalric career. They also need to learn to be obedient and humble, even to the extreme of speaking little. The task of teaching these young men falls on the shoulders of elderly nobles. In addition, ancient Romans are praised for their practice of promoting worthy men even when they are still very young.

Thus we could conclude that for Christine the kings and knights are not greatly differentiated. They need to emulate the same virtues, have very

[58] Willard suggests that this part provides the basis for Christine's *Feats of Arms* ("Christine de Pizan on the Art of Warfare" 8).

similar courses of education by learning from elderly knights, and gain worldly honour as a reward. The author then proceeds with the six ways in which knights should gain honour: military prowess, boldness, comradeship, truthfulness, love of honour, and finally, craftiness. As in the case of kings, the value of expertise in war is emphasized. The Romans, because they particularly love waging war, are therefore very noble (64). In order to achieve victory in war, it is crucial that one is prepared to be flexible, which is illustrated by the story of Minos, who pretends to be the son of Jupiter so that his soldiers would obey him. Justifying the use in battle of trickery, Christine maintains that "The wise captain or leader of soldiers could wisely pretend to be greater than he is . . . and if he finds any good and just deception, I believe that it is well and wisely done" (71). But the author does not define what "good and just deception" is—the one shared characteristic of the *exempla* she offers is that in each case strategic deception helps win the battle. Perhaps on the battlefield victory alone suffices to justify the means.

In the last and shortest part of her work, Christine discusses the appropriate conduct of the other estates. Although this part is not closely concerned with knights, it enables us to see some curious aspects of the author's social-political view.

After Christine once again asserts the indispensability of all the body parts forming a harmonious whole and obeying the head, the reader would soon notice that the author places the clerics among the populace: the old division of society into those who pray, those who fight, and those who work no longer suits the social reality of the late-fourteenth century. It might be difficult to find suitable places for the burghers, merchants, and the artisans in the old system as well[59]. However, even the clerics do not study purely

[59] Compare Langland's ambivalent attitude towards the merchants in *Piers Plowman*, as

spiritual subjects—they are not identical to those who pray.[60] It is the university students that form the clerical class, and Christine does not specify the kind of knowledge they seek. The clerics by God's grace and fortune seek knowledge so that they would gain "the treasure of pure and perfect sufficiency" (96). The model seekers of truth as listed by the author are Cleanthes, Chryssipus, Seneca, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Democritus, Carneades, and Cato, none of whom is a Christian theologian. The lack of Christian *exempla* and quotations can also be observed in other parts of the work.[61] The majority of the *exempla* are set in the classical period, and therefore it is worth noticing that most references to Biblical authority are found in the last part. The use of classical examples, as Douglas Kelly suggests, could cause certain problems. In the *Epistre Othea* Christine distinguishes classical and Christian examples, and Kelly argues that the pagan stories need to be understood as evaluable human actions retaining certain moral and spiritual authority despite being lies (65–66). The case in *The Book of the Body Politic* is slightly different—the characters in the stories are not deities or mythological figures but people in real history. One might also wonder why Christine does not provide more Christian *exempla*. This is a question difficult to answer. Perhaps she is being true to her classical sources

well as their prominence in Chaucer's General Prologue.

[60] Jean Dunbabin points out that in addition to the sometimes blurred boundary between knights and clerics in terms of appearance (Templars and Hospitallers, as well as laymen wearing the tonsure and clerks' clothes when doing clerkly work), the Latin word *clericus* covers both meanings of clerks, who may or may not become clerics, and clerics proper, and if someone is referred to as *clericus*, "the only clear conclusion to be drawn was that he was not, by profession at least, a soldier" (27). In fact less well-off clerks often had to make a living in the fields of law, education, administration, and trade, and university students in Paris, Orléans, and Toulouse were required to be clerks (27).

[61] Liliane Dulac, speaking of the numerous Roman references in *The Book of the Body Politic*, suggests that "La plus générale revient à affirmer qu'il n'est pas de meilleur moyen d'inciter fortement à la vertu que de suivre «le stille d'icellui noble aucteur Valere» (23.4). De fait Christine semble à plusieurs reprises réduire son ambition à la confection d'extraits, comme si elle ne se proposait que de rendre plus accessible l'essentiel de l'énorme livre-source dont elle fait l'éloge" (101).

or she does not bother. Yet as for the placing of the few Biblical quotations I would propose an explanation. As Antony Black notes, among the several modes of political discourse medieval people use, “theological language, deriving from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible . . . was used in most discussions about government and social relationships. It could give rise to ideas about kingship and obedience” (7). It is precisely this function that these Biblical quotations serve in these passages on the commoners’ duty to obey the king. In Chapter 3 of Part III, St. Paul and St. Peter are quoted to argue that the populace should obey both good and bad kings (93). The authority of Matthew is invoked to show that even Christ “gave an example of being subject in deed and in word to revere and obey lords and princes” (94). Thus the common people should follow Christ’s example and not refuse to pay taxes. The Biblical authority is also used to muffle people’s complaint about their kings: “the wise should teach the simple and the ignorant to keep quiet about those things which are not their domain and from which great danger can come and no benefit” (100).

The Bible is quoted in both chapters in the section on artisans and laborers. The quotation in the first chapter is a warning to the artisans against gluttony and presumably other forms of incontinence (106), but this warning is quite generic and thus applicable to other estates as well. The second chapter, which is also the penultimate chapter in the whole work, uses Biblical sources in a fervent praise of peasants:

> Of all the estates, they are the most necessary, those who are cultivators of the earth which feed and nourish the human creature, without whom the world would end in little time . . . They do nothing that is unpraiseworthy. (107)

Peasants’ work is noble primarily due to the fact that both origins of humanity, Adam and Noah, are peasants. But besides this statement there is no other

reason for this argument, and the reality of the peasant's life is barely touched upon except the fact that they are despised and downtrodden, as the modern reader would expect.

In this highly idealistic picture of the farmer's life, Christine remarks that "When those of the highest rank choose for their retirement a humble life of simplicity as the best for the soul and the body, then they are surely rich who voluntarily are poor. For they have no fear of being betrayed, poisoned, robbed, or envied, for their wealth is in sufficiency" (108). Later the author declares that a poor and pure life can help people avoid temptations and make it easier to be saved. While this account of a carefree life as a peasant contradicts the author's earlier statement that the ungrateful do many evils to the peasants, the voluntary poverty topos might be reminiscent of characters such as Piers or Conscience. However, the spiritual element is far less significant in Christine's portrayal of a peasant's life, and voluntary poverty, as well as the renunciation of the world it signifies, are only for the old age.

So far we have surveyed Christine de Pizan's vision of the ideal society, in which the kings and knights only differ in the amount of power they possess and the degree of perfection expected in them. They are educated in the same way, advised to practice the same virtues, rule both in the government and on the battlefield, and by fulfilling their duties it only seems apposite that they gain worldly renown. The virtues are not regarded as good enough in themselves, but in the *exempla* they always lead to some practical benefits that the kings/knights would also gain if they follow the advice. The rest of the estates only need to remain obedient and become the social support they are meant to be. Although Christine mentions the possibility that kings could adopt a peasant lifestyle that brings peace,[62] by no means does she

[62] Compare *Piers Plowman*, in which Christ is a farmer as well as the highest authority

recommend this to her readers. *The Book of the Body Politic* is only one of numerous manuals of instruction to kings and knights, but one example would suffice to demonstrate that for medieval authors of political treatises the division of kings and knights is not clear-cut.[63]

Knighthood is a core quality that kings should cultivate. Douglas Kelly notes that it is Christine's common practice to choose from several attributes those that best describe what she intends to highlight in something (52). In *Chemin de long estude* she presents to the reader a debate between Knighthood, Wisdom, Wealth and Nobility as to which one, and only which one, makes an ideal monarch (53), but later the author concludes that a good king must unite all four by emulating respective virtues. Similarly, in Charny's *Book of Chivalry*, the author at one point discusses the function of rulers. Among the many duties listed, he specifically underlines that

> They were, therefore, chosen to be the first to take up arms and to strike with all their might and expose themselves to physical dangers of battle in defence of their people and their land. They were, therefore, chosen to be bold and of good courage against their enemies and against all those who seek to deprive them of possessions or honor. (Charny 77)

Bold and strong, Charny's ideal ruler must be a ferocious fighter, who can defend his possessions and honour from invaders.

From Christine's and Charny's accounts it is very clear that rulers have chivalric obligations. With knighthood being inseparable from kingship, in my discussion of ideal chivalric behaviour I need not be restricted to chivalric manuals as sources. It is time to look at which aspects of knighthood were

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and most exemplary knight.

[63] In reality the sovereign often faced the danger of being equalized with the chivalric company he kept. For two strategies a medieval prince would adopt in answer to this threat, see Duby 301-3.

most appealing to and identifiable by late medieval English kings and lesser members of the aristocracy. Caxton's dedications in his chivalric publications might be good sources with which such inquiries can be made.

4.3 Caxton: the Publisher and His Readers[64]

While the chivalric manuals hitherto surveyed served diverse purposes in their original contexts and were written under different circumstances with a time span of over two hundred years, some of them were translated and published by William Caxton. In fact, the large number of chivalric works included in the list of Caxton's translations and publications attests to his, and presumably his customers', enthusiasm about chivalry. While multiple voices are present in some of Caxton's publications, with *Le Morte d'Arthur* being perhaps the finest example, we may well assume that in his prologues and epilogues he highlights what he believes are the central themes of the works, or at least what he deems would be most attractive to his readers/listeners, especially the aristocracy. Therefore, Caxton's perspectives, if lacking theoretical depth (they are indeed, and the same might be said about the commercials we see today), are the epitome of the mainstream and orthodox views of chivalry in his age. After all, it is almost unimaginable that such a successful business man as Caxton was, with multiple connections in the highest social ranks and often dedicating his works to the English king (no matter who was king at a certain point in his career) would do anything other than give expression to conventional opinion in the dedications that to a large extent served advertising purposes. Blake comments that in the prologues and epilogues Caxton is most independent and Caxton the editor merges with Caxton the translator, and as a consequence, he "gives details not only of his own life, but also of contemporary fashions and prejudices" (*Caxton and His World* 151).

An analysis of the prose Caxton composed for his chivalric publications seems to suggest that not only is he not much concerned with knights' religious

[64] In the two sections on Caxton, his publication of Malory's work will be sometimes referred to as the *Morte D'arthur*.

duties with the exception of defending the Church and carrying out crusades, but he also mainly focuses on the educational power his books would exercise in order to encourage knights to seek worldly fame and honour, which is probably what his potential buyers were primarily interested in.[65] In addition, an examination of some of the essential chivalric works he published might also shed some light on the relationship between the patron and the printer in the publication of works that serve ideological purposes and consolidate hegemonic masculinity in late medieval England.[66]

To justify only investigating Caxton's prologues and epilogues, a quick survey of his translation techniques, choice of texts, literary merit and personal disposition is helpful. The faithfulness, or rather literalism, of his translating style has been widely recognized by scholars. One of his modern editors summarizes that "He occasionally departs a very little way from his MS.; he cannot be called a free translator, such as Sir Gilbert Hay. Most of his editors have realized that his faithfulness to his original is a merit rather than a defect; it has not always been realized that it is a merit because he is just free enough to enable him to express the French sentences in an English way" (Byles xlvi).[67] On the other hand, while other critics might have held a

[65] A large portion of Caxton studies are on his printing practices. During the past few decades there have been several biographies that discuss both his life events contextualized and his techniques as a translator and printer. Some of these biographies include: Edmund Childs: *William Caxton: A Portrait in the Background*; N. F. Blake: *Caxton and His World*; Richard Deacon: *A Biography of William Caxton: The First English Editor, Printer, Merchant and Translator*. In recent years there have also been explorations of the relationship between Caxton and his patrons. For a very technical survey of Caxton's introduction of printing to England and a new discussion of the chronological order of his publications, see Hellinga.

[66] In fact, though the authors of chivalric works almost always claim that people in their times no longer lived up to the lofty ideals, it might not even matter whether the readers adhered to such values or not, which is why the masculine ideal derived from such virtues is called "hegemonic." For the definition of hegemonic masculinity, see *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*.

[67] The contradictory opinion that Caxton is rash in translating and he does not have much literary merit seems equally, if not more, prevalent than this milder view held by Byles.

different opinion on the quality of his translation, its literalism has never been an issue for debate. The author of one of the best biographies of Caxton comments thus, “All editors of Caxton texts . . . note how closely he follows his original; his unashamed transference of French words and idioms into English; and his frequent misunderstanding of the French” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 126). In his translation, even when he could have recast the story, like the tale of Reynard the Fox that does not depend on locality for its effects, he faithfully follows the original, because “such a reorganization would have involved too much time and trouble; hence only minor adjustments are made” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 126–27).[68] With speed being Caxton’s “cardinal principle in making a translation,” Blake further comments, he “keeps very close to the French original and often seems to take each clause as an independent unit without worrying about the sense of the passage” (*Caxton and His World* 133).[69] No matter how Caxton’s rendering of French should be evaluated, his original dedications in prose, with the formulas they usually follow and sets of catch phrases frequently repeated across his publications,[70] might be found to bear little interest to the modern reader. However, these seemingly inconsequential dedications provide us with useful knowledge of late medieval attitudes towards chivalry as much as his publications do.

There are scholarly controversies as to which social group Caxton’s target customers actually were.[71] One often invoked defence of his choice of

[68] Yet Caxton does make changes in his translations occasionally, and if he does not do them out of patriotism, he does so to make the texts better suit the English readers. In the *Feats of Arms*, for example, Caxton removes two disparaging references to the English, who in the original text kept a French castle illegally and broke a truce (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 127).

[69] For Caxton as a translator, see Blake 125–50.

[70] For example, the phrase “every astate and degre” is one of Caxton’s favourites and he uses it profusely (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 167), another being “achieve and accomplish” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 169).

[71] For a survey of the history of Caxton’s reputation, see Blake 194-216.

texts was made by the Rev. J. Lewis, who claims that it was not Caxton himself who wanted to publish the books,[72] but that he was required to do so by society (noted by Blake, *Caxton and His World* 207). Other scholars have expressed a harsher view. Gibbon concurs with Lewis that Caxton was trying to satisfy the needs of his contemporaries, but he criticizes (although mistakenly) Caxton for satisfying the aristocracy with works on heraldry, hawking and chess (he never published anything in the first two categories) and "to amuse the popular credulity with romances of fabulous knights, and legends of more fabulous saints" (noted by Blake, *Caxton and His World* 208). Gibbon is probably right about one thing, though. Chivalric romances had as much appeal to Caxton's first readers as saints' lives. Calling Caxton "probably a snob" in many respects, Deacon believes that regardless of his personal preferences, the items he chose to translate and print were those desired by the Courts of England and Burgundy, because in Caxton's time and profession it was an economic imperative to cater to the needs of the higher classes, considering the price of books (66).[73] On the other hand, an autobiographer, who believes that Caxton's work as a translator was more valuable than that as a printer, wrote in the early twentieth century that "Caxton's target readers were not the aristocratic class only, but he catered for all who could read" (Plomer 174–75).[74] While some might argue that Caxton did not publish the best literary works (presumably they would have been

[72] Later referred to as "nothing but mean and frivolous things" and "valuable for little else than being early performances in the Art of Printing" by an anonymous commentator in 1766 (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 207–08). That critic believes had Caxton had better taste, better works, now lost, would have been passed on to later generations. Dr. Bühler, on the other hand, suggests that his printed works were more influential than those by better writers, and that he instinctively published the best in chivalric literature (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 211).

[73] A manuscript would understandably be more expensive.

[74] For a similar view expressed in a much more recent study, see Ramey, who argues that Caxton's aesthetics of access "cuts across class and dialect barriers to the extent that it would seem to obviate them" (731).

known and accessible to the aristocracy already), Caxton's translations and publications appealed to a much wider readership than he could even imagine. Similarly, Blake suggests that Caxton published not only for the court but also for the public,[75] albeit only the higher social classes, concluding that while Caxton might have been more careful with his translations, "the choice of books would have remained unaltered, for he was supplying a limited public with what it wanted," and with financial concerns as the decisive factor, "[Caxton] was evidently not prepared to take the financial risk of being a pacemaker" (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 216). There is no question that Caxton wrote the prologues and epilogues for his books, "such a fickle commodity as fashionable literature" (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 151), dedicating them to patrons, the choice of whom may often be crucial to a book's reception, in order to gain financial aid and support in increasing his fame. However, Blake's suggestion that Caxton is primarily a businessman who publishes for profit is in need of revaluation, because human beings are often too complicated for their motivations to be solely stemming from economic forces, and a businessman who has a strong attachment to the past is not difficult to imagine. As a consequence, for Deacon, who places his discussions of Caxton's translation and printing of chivalric materials in the chapter titled "Caxton the Romantic," Caxton's personal interest in chivalric stories and practices cannot be completely neglected. Referring to Caxton as "one of the early English romantics" (54), a title which I think is somewhat

[75] A view shared by Hellinga, who suggests that patrons "were a matter of opportunity and not a basis for business." It was Caxton who began to publish books when the public were not used to owning them and as a consequence won a large readership. The influence of his publications should not be overemphasized, though. In fact the import trade of printed books, of which Caxton was also a member, had a greater impact on the English intellectual life than Caxton's texts did (Hellinga 101–02). Similarly, Russell Rutter believes that the importance of Caxton's patrons has been exaggerated, and this view "submerges Caxton the publisher in a sea of authors and allows the reader to lose sight altogether of Caxton's status as a businessman" (469).

exaggerated, Deacon believes that romanticism dominated his choice of texts for publication. For him, Caxton's commitment to chivalric literature is considered a way of escape into the romantic and mystic world of chivalry and the fact that he occupied himself with translation rather than writing original work, while nothing remarkable in itself, might be seen as a sign for his love of the age of chivalry that he also believed was quickly waning (57). Then it seems reasonable to argue that "It is not putting too fine a point on his intentions to say that love of chivalric legends was a constant spur" to Caxton's strenuous efforts to translate and print chivalric books (Deacon 64). With the little information we currently hold, and are likely to hold, about Caxton's life, any discussion of his motivations would necessarily involve a great deal of speculation. Even if we do garner more information from forgotten records, motivations would still be extremely difficult to determine, and are in fact irrelevant to the examination of the mainstream chivalric ideal in his time that is the core question in this section, because as Blake argues, "it would be fairest to conclude that his individual contribution to English letters is not so important as the evidence he gives of the taste and culture of the fifteenth century" (*Caxton and His World* 216). Being a merchant, and a successful one at that, Caxton must have recognized the needs of his contemporaries, chosen materials that would cater to the popular taste of his time, and highlighted in his prologues and epilogues the points of greatest interest to his readers. The core of the chivalric ideal as the populace saw it would appear very different from what someone who has only read, say, *Piers Plowman*, would expect.

Caxton followed certain French and English traditions of writing dedications when he composed his own. In general, the dedications usually comprise three parts, each corresponding to one aspect of the reading experience: the value of the book either because of its novelty, its stories or its

courtly style, the nobility of the patron(s), and the humility of the publisher. It is also observed by Blake that the three traditional themes are usually accompanied by moral precepts and advice to behave virtuously (*Caxton and His World* 153). The dedications serve a practical purpose as well, because a large number of them were intended as brief introductions to the translations of French works, with which the English audience may not be very familiar. Among the above three elements, the first two directly reflect Caxton's (and his contemporaries') view of chivalry and will thus be examined.

4.4 Caxton's Prologues and Epilogues to His Chivalric Publications

Caxton did not write a prologue to the *Order of Chivalry*, and in the epilogue to this treatise, after briefly informing the reader of the basic information of this publication (it was translated from French at the request of a squire by Caxton living in Westminster) Caxton differentiates this work from more popular chivalric romances and claims that the *Order* "is not requysyte to every comyn man to have, but to noble gentylmen that by their vertu entende to come and entre into the noble ordre of chyvalry" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 126), [76] thus "[stressing] the aristocratic conception even more than Lull . . . [insisting] that it is the preserve of a privileged class" (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 129). Caxton appears to be rather convinced of the necessity of maintaining the existing social structure, and while only the best in the aristocracy are entitled to enter this exclusive order, he bitterly comments that the formerly lofty ideals of chivalry have sunk into oblivion and not received their due honour in his time, contrasting the sorry contemporary state of things with the golden chivalric age in ancient times, when English knights had universal fame. Caxton's patriotism is clearly visible, for England used to produce the best knights, and in providing examples for English superiority the difference between fiction and history is not Caxton's concern. Before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, no other knight could match Brenius and Belynus, who originally came from Britain and conquered vast lands, and as for after the incarnation, the stories of King Arthur with his Knights of the Round Table fill numerous books.

Caxton's contemporary English knights, however, have deviated from the true path. Indulging themselves in the comforts of life, they "but slepe and take ease and ar al disordred fro chyvalry," (127) spending their time in baths

[76] All quotations from Caxton's prologues and epilogues are from *Caxton's Own Prose* edited by Blake, and the quotations are referenced by page numbers.

and playing dice.[77] With "honest and good rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode" having been utterly neglected, Caxton suggests the first remedy for such degeneracy: reading books and learning from them. By reading the tales of the Knights of the Round Table, the reader shall learn the true meaning of "manhode,[78] curtosye and gentylnesse" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 126) and presumably imitate the examples they set. Listing the names of the Arthurian heroes, Caxton also seizes this valuable opportunity to enhance the sale of one of his best known books yet to be published.[79] The other source of knowledge and inspiration is English history, where the reader will benefit from the illustrious deeds of famous English kings and knights, an eminent host starting with Richard the Lionheart.[80]

Caxton proposes yet another piece of advice for English knights to become worthier of their profession: the (re)establishment of a national system of regularly hosting tournaments and rewarding the champion. Ideally, a knight should be familiar with riding a horse and proper use of armour and weapons.

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[77] As Blake points out, fifteenth-century knights were unlikely to spend all their time in baths, and Caxton may simply be following a classical tradition of complaint here (*Caxton's Own Prose* 170). It is also worth noticing that Caxton does not mention the wicked deeds which some knights in his day must be doing. In addition, the lament that he expresses in the epilogue to the *Book of the Order of Chivalry* that contemporary English knights regrettably do not act according to the chivalric code is distantly echoed in his description of St. George's Chapel in Windsor, the heart of the Order of the Garter, the very emblem of English chivalry, in his brief introduction to St. George in the *Golden Legend* (94). Also compare St. Bernard's criticism of knights spending too much time playing dice besides indulging themselves in other forms of entertainment, as well as his praise of the Knights Templar who do not wash their hair frequently.

[78] While Caxton is not being ironic here, manhood was not always used positively. For how the words manhood or manliness may be used by medieval English poets in an ironic way or as referring to male virtues without irony, see Burrow, "Versions of 'Manliness' in the Poetry of Chaucer, Langland, and Hoccleve." This is another case of similar actions with different ethical connotations.

[79] Caxton uses his prologues and epilogues as opportunities for advertising, and previously he took a similar approach in *Godfrey of Boloyne* three years before to promote his future *Morte d'Arthur* (Painter 143), a view also shared by Sutton and Visser-Fuchs (122) among others.

[80] The English kings and knights on whom Caxton heaps his praise were the predecessors and ancestors of Richard and his wife.

Yet Caxton is sure that many will be found inadequate in these essential skills.[81] As a consequence, he suggests that jousts be held at least once a year by the king for the knights to hone their military skills and compete with each other. To add incentive for participation, a precious award in the form of a diamond or jewel should also be offered. All these costly efforts aim to make English knights to "resorte to th'auncyent custommes of chyvalry to grete fame and renommee" so that they could better serve the king whenever needed. Caxton's final appeal can be read in two ways. His plea that every man of noble blood should read his book and follow its instructions, a tremendous task that Richard himself should command to be carried out,[82] means better trained knights for England, where the order of chivalry will bathe in even greater glory than it ever did in the ancient times, and, of course, more profit from book sales for Caxton. Referred to as a "devotional and unpractical treatise" by Painter, the *Book of the Order of Chivalry* is without doubt highly idealistic. Somehow seeing traits of "a devout Catholic" in Caxton, Deacon suggests that Caxton's goal to equate Christianity with chivalry would have succeeded "had the Code of Chivalry been observed as it was originally set out" (62). Nevertheless, it seems that financial concerns do surface even when

[81] While Painter argues that Caxton is making a daring (and possibly dangerous) move with his epilogue in lecturing Richard III on his rule, with the latter being "a notorious lifelong non-participant in the make believe chivalry of Edward's reign" (142), the measures suggested by Caxton in terms of the revival of the practice of tournament mainly serve to provide a source of motivation for the knights to improve their skills. Besides, the problem he keeps emphasizing in the epilogue, the decay of chivalry, a trope we also find in Malory, is in fact a perennial issue for all generations and needs not be overly emphasized. As a consequence, his censure of degenerate knighthood in England is a common motif and should not be readily interpreted as necessarily a subversive reference to Richard's reign. For lists of various authors' lamenting the decay of chivalry, see Benson 145–47; Keen 233–34.

[82] J. R. Goodman argues that Caxton, apart from being a great promoter of chivalry, had a conscientious programme of publishing chivalric texts (654–55). Sutton and Visser-Fuchs are somewhat suspicious of this view, and instead suggest that "what is far more certain is that he was promoting his own book" (so that Richard may order copies just as the king in the narrative demands copies to be circulated) (122).

advocating lofty chivalric ideals.[83]

Caxton does not give the reader any surprise in the epilogue to *Feats of Arms*, and what can be said about it is fairly limited. Besides the biographical information it provides, that Henry VII requested Caxton to print *The Fayts of Arms* in 1489 and the latter was likely to have received the manuscript from John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, as well as the dates of the completion of translation and printing, the reader is told that having first identified the main sources for Pizan's book as *De Re Militari* and the *Arbre of Bataylles*,[84] Caxton reaffirms that the treatise's central theme is "werre and batailles" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 81). The book has one practical purpose: to teach the techniques of war, which are not reserved for the aristocracy only, so that "every estate hye and lowe" will "have knowlege how they ought to behave theym in the fayttes of warre and of bataylles," including situations such as "bataylles, sieges, rescowse and all other fayttes, subtyltees and remedyes for meschieves" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 82). Pizan's original work is of a very pragmatic concern, and Caxton does not seem interested in moralizing this treatise.

In comparison, far more information could be garnered from the trilogy of three Christian Worthies Caxton published, the first of which is Arthur. Caxton

[83] I do not entirely agree with Sutton and Visser-Fuch's argument, which is in turn much indebted to N. F. Blake's studies in Caxton, that Caxton is primarily a man of business and his "blurbs" are mainly written for marketing purposes. As is previously mentioned, because as Blake himself suggests, Caxton is a man of his time, and he shared prevailing attitudes in the fifteenth century, his personal disposition does not really matter for our purpose in this chapter. I do not intend to evaluate how important patrons might have been to Caxton, which might be the topic of another thesis. For the relationship between late medieval/early modern English authors and their patrons in general, see McCabe, especially 149–53, where the author discusses in detail that Caxton may not have been helped by his alleged patrons as much as he claims, but that he mainly uses their names for advertising purposes.

[84] Although Vegetius wrote his military treatise more than a thousand years before Christine, "Christine . . . was briefed by her many soldier friends with up-to-date technical information on gunnery, gunpower, siegecraft and military ethics, so that her book remained of practical value in Caxton's time" (Painter 169).

explains in the prologue to *Morte D'arthur* that he publishes the work at the request of "many noble and dyvers gentylmen of thys royame of Englond"[85] for stories on two main topics: "the noble hystorye of the Saynt Greal and of the moost renomed Crysten kyng, fyrst and chyef of the thre best Crysten and worthy, Kyng Arthur," (*Caxton's Own Prose* 106) who is to be remembered more than other Christian kings.[86] The nine "worthy and the best that ever were" are grouped into three categories between three pagans, three Jews, and three Christians, six before the incarnation of Christ and three after. With Arthur being the first of the three Christian Worthies, Caxton once again displays his patriotism that because Arthur used to be an emperor in Britain and there had already been a lot of Arthurian materials in circulation in France, the aforementioned noblemen required him to print the history of Arthur and of his knights, in particular that of the Holy Grail, concluding with the story of the death of Arthur. Yet Caxton acknowledges that at first he thought the Arthurian stories were merely "fayned and fables" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 107). After listing the arguments and pieces of physical evidence by which he was convinced by the noblemen that Arthur was real, Caxton claimed that he printed a copy which Malory "dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 109). Highlighting honour, he claims that his purpose in printing this work is for the nobles to "see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuous dede . . . by whyche [some knights] came to honour" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 109), and how the vicious, on the other hand, were punished. The noble lords and ladies, he

[85] Blake suggests that Caxton is pretending here: in fact he may have printed the book mainly for the person who gave him the manuscript (*Caxton's Own Prose* 165).

[86] King Arthur was more than probably held in high regard by Henry VII. The first child of Henry VII and Elizabeth, born in 1486, is rumoured to have been christened Arthur after the legendary king (Childs 171). The naming could have been inspired by Caxton's edition of *Le Morte* which came out the year before, but it is impossible to confirm any direct link between the two.

continues, shall find “many joyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble and renomed actes of humanyte, gentylnesse and chyvalryes . . . noble chivalrye, curtosye, humanyte, frendlynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue and synne” (*Caxton’s Own Prose* 109). This unremarkable list may still tell us something about Caxton’s view of the core factors of chivalry. Most of the virtuous qualities Caxton sets out as attractive to his readers could have attained religious overtones, but it seems quite unlikely that Caxton is suggesting anything in that direction. His book will not only be a source of entertainment, but also a volume of *exempla*. If one follows the examples it sets out, doing good things and avoiding bad ones, one will surely have “good fame and renommee” (*Caxton’s Own Prose* 109). Of course Caxton does not forget to mention that the book is written as a reminder for its readers to keep themselves away from sinning and focus on the eternal bliss in heaven rather than this transitory life on earth, a routine statement in his dedications, yet in the next paragraph he once again repeats himself and offers another list of the central themes of the book as he sees it: “noble actes, feates of armes of chyvalrye, prowesse, hardynesse, humanyte, love, curtosye and veray gentylnesse, wyth many wonderful hystoryes and adventures” (*Caxton’s Own Prose* 109), this time with even fewer religious overtones. It might be argued that Caxton has a higher regard for the story of the Holy Grail, it being the first component of Arthurian stories that he was asked to translate in the beginning and the first Caxton later lists, but his emphasis is still laid on the secular elements of chivalry in general.

Apart from the prologue to the *Morte* (the 11-line epilogue is simply a repetitive introduction to the basic information of the publication and therefore will not be discussed), Caxton’s rearrangement of Malory’s original work is also worth noticing. While he respected the original forms of poetic works, such as Chaucerian poetry, he did not value prose works as highly, including

the *Morte*. “For Caxton, *Morte Darthur* was merely one version of the Arthur story, a version which was in English and therefore suitable for printing after it had been edited” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 108). In Malory’s original manuscript, separate tales can often be read as unities in themselves, but “the division of the printed version into books makes each book part of a whole, and some connection, however tenuous, is made between all books and King Arthur . . . to satisfy the demand for a work dealing with England’s sole representative among the Nine Worthies” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 110).[87] On the other hand, such a treatment by Caxton also fragments the text and foregrounds a central theme that previously might not be that perceptible, as Blake comments, “each small episode tends to become the illustration of a moral and can be read independently. This work has become something like a sermon on chivalry with innumerable, carefully indexed, exempla,” thus making it easier for readers to select stories that are illustrative of particular virtues and vices (*Caxton and His World* 110–11).

One important similarity that the three works in the trilogy share is their emphasis on crusades. In particular, in Book V of the *Morte D’arthur*, Caxton’s removal of detailed descriptions of battles and geography as well as speeches/actions of minor characters serve to “bring out the Christian morals and chivalry in it . . . [and] by cutting out much other material he is able to throw them into greater prominence” (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 113). Crusading still had great appeal for the first readers of the *Morte D’arthur*, and for Caxton it is not a distant echo of failed endeavours in the past in remote lands, but something concrete that calls for the attention of the ruling classes in Christendom and resources to be invested.

Crusading plays an even more prominent role in the other two works of

[87] For a general discussion of Caxton’s Worthies series, see Kuskin.

the trilogy. In Caxton's prologue to *Charles the Great*, quoting St. Paul and Boethius, he first draws the conclusion that reading tales of ancient people offers readers *exempla* which encourage them to live a good life and avoid doing evil, a reason frequently brought up by Caxton. Once again attributing his primary motivation for printing this book to the request of a nobleman, in this case "Messire Henry Bolomyer, Chanonne of Lausanne" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 66) and after the usual humility topos about his meagre ability and thus unsuitability for the task, Caxton manages to connect the disjointed stories and organizes them in a proper order. The deeds of Charlemagne and his knights are performed with "grete strength and ryght ardaunt courage," and there are two main purposes, "to the exhaltacyon of the Crysten fayth and to the confusyon of the hethen sarazyns and myscreaunts" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 66–67). Only just violence and the most closely related qualities needed in order to use it, prowess and courage, are considered here.

Caxton does not forget to locate his book on Charlemagne within the publishing scheme of books on the three Worthies, either. Previously he has published the *Morte D'arthur* and *Godefroy of Boloyn* (also known as *The Siege of Jerusalem*), so that some noblemen asked him to publish the book on the first French Christian king in order that the majority of the English people, who could read neither Latin nor French, would have access to this work.[88] The greatness of Charlemagne seems to have outweighed patriotism, but an Englishman can still benefit from its universal teaching, with Caxton admitting that the making of this book is "to th'honour of the Frensshmen and for prouffyte of every man" (67). Caxton hopes this book will "be to the helthe

[88] This statement might seem to suggest that Caxton's potential readers also include those from lower classes, for whom the knowledge of Latin and French was not very common. However, Blake is dubious about how much weight should be placed on this statement. In most instances, he publishes only a small number of copies for the elite, and it is worth noting that Edward IV had a good knowledge of French (*Caxton's Own Prose* 153).

and savacion of every persone" (67), but he speaks of salvation only in very general terms. The humility topos is once again invoked, and Caxton concludes the prologue with a prayer for his parents' and his own soul.[89]

For Godfrey of Bouillon, the most recent member of the Worthies, participation in the crusades is not only one of his glorious deeds, as crusading is for Arthur and Charlemagne, but he is primarily known as the first ruler of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In the very beginning of Caxton's prologue to the *Siege* he defines the theme of his work as "the hye couragyous faytes and valyaunt actes of noble, illustrous and vertuous personnes" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 137). This is not only to bring eternal fame to the glorious characters in the past, but also to move the readers' and listeners' hearts so that they would eschew vices and accomplish good deeds, with the ultimate goal still being fame, or, as Caxton puts it, "to lyve in remembraunce perpetuel" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 137). Such examples of "werkys leeful and honneste" include God's maintaining the Christian faith, retaking Jerusalem and liberating Christians oppressed by Muslims. The first task can only be accomplished by the fulfilment of the latter two. As is the practice of model crusade sermons, which take the majority of their *exempla* from the Old Testament, Caxton claims that the liberation of Christians by crusaders is foreshadowed in the Old Testament narratives centring on three characters, Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus, the three Jewish Worthies. Similarly, the three pagan Worthies are briefly mentioned, and Caxton says little apart from mentioning the ancient authors who recorded their deeds, with the exception of Alexander, about whom Caxton may have had little knowledge. When Caxton finally turns to the Christian Worthies, he first praises King

[89] In the epilogue to *Charles the Great*, which it seems quite unnecessary to discuss in detail, Caxton simply recapitulates the points he has made in the prologue.

Arthur[90] and Charlemagne respectively, reviewing their glorious deeds and advertising books on them. It is a pity that the story of Godfrey of Bouillon, who lived closest to Caxton's time among the three, born in a neighbouring country, and on whom numerous books have been written in Latin and French, remained little known in the English language, Caxton comments in the next paragraph. Apart from the moral teaching it offers, the translation and publication of such a work has a further practical concern: the "Turke" are threatening Christendom more than they did in Godfrey's time. It is Caxton's wish that the whole of Christendom should unite and have peace within itself.[91] The purpose for publishing this book, therefore, is for the exhortation of all Christian "prynces, lordes, barons, knyghtes, gentilmen, marchauntes, and all the comyn peple of this noble royamme, Walys and Yrlond" that they should not only resist the advent of the Turks, but they should take the initiative to retake the Holy City as well. A project as large as a crusade is definitely not a task solely for those who fight. The whole society must be involved to take back the place at which Christ shed his blood for the human race.[92]

[90] It should be noted that in the list of Arthurian knights/stories, Caxton does place the Holy Grail, Galahad, and Lancelot as the first three mentioned, soon adding that Arthur is the most "gloryous and shynyng" and therefore he should be placed above all (*Caxton's Own Prose* 139).

[91] Commenting on the Rev. John Lewis's criticism of Caxton for advocating the Holy War, which he regarded as the worst of the errors and superstitions in his time, lamenting that crusades "rapidly degenerated into piratical and brutal raids in quest of loot, carried out by the European Crusaders with a ferocity and barbarity that far exceeded anything the Saracens committed," Deacon suggests that Lewis has made a rushed conclusion because later Caxton does plea for peace within Christendom and urge the aristocracy to maintain peace (62-3). In addition, Caxton also calls the proposed crusade to the Holy City a "pylgremage" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 142).Yet his vision of a purified crusade does not solve the fundamental collision between violence and Christian love. For a detailed discussion, see the previous section on Crusades. Also compare St. Bernard's exhortation that those who were causing trouble in the West should leave and participate in the crusades, thus bringing peace to the Christian countries.

[92] As is usually the case in Caxton, the epilogue to *The Siege of Jerusalem* is an abbreviated recapitulation of the contents of the prologue and therefore it would be repetitious to discuss it in detail.

Several critics have seen Caxton as a chameleon, who manoeuvred through the political turmoil of his day. He seemed to have made some last-minute revisions to the dedications in his publications as the political situations changed. In *Knight of the Tower* published on 31 January 1484 Caxton only mentioned it was requested by "a noble lady which hath brought forth many noble and fayr daughters which ben vertuously nourisshed and lerned" (111) who is probably Elizabeth Woodville but Caxton refrained from making it clear.[93] Similarly, in the prologue to *Curial*, which possibly came out in 1484, Caxton referred to a figure who should possibly be identified with Anthony Woodville as "a noble and vertuous Erle" (72). In the second edition of *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* that was either published in 1481 or 1483, he omitted the dedication to George Duke of Clarence, in whose death Richard of Gloucester was believed to have played an active part at that time (Childs 159). With respect to *The Book of the Order of Chivalry* published in 1484, although "its translation was commissioned by 'a gentyl and noble Esquyer', who could have been an adherent of the Woodvilles," Caxton is regarded as having "turned his coat completely" and "shamelessly dedicated it to Richard 'my redoubted lord and king" (Childs 159).[94] Similarly, Caxton tried to blur Earl Rivers as the instigator of the printing of the *Morte D'arthur*, in whose prologue "a certain gentleman" brought a manuscript to him. While Blake previously claimed that the identity of the man could not be pinned down due to Caxton's intentional concealing because of political conditions (*Caxton and His World* 95), it has been more recently suggested that the gentleman was possibly

[93] For the identity of this lady, see Blake, "The 'Nobel Lady' in Caxton's The Book of the Knyght of the Towre" 92–93.

[94] For the dates of publication of these books and the dedications, see Childs 158-59. Blake shares the view that the squire is almost certainly a member of the Woodville faction, pointing out that it is a unique practice for Caxton to replace of one patron by another and that this is the only book he dedicated to Richard III, probably indicating the latter's lack of interest (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 94).

Rivers and the manuscript was the Winchester manuscript (Hellinga 89–94).[95] The potential gain from having patrons is further implied by the fact that the *Morte D'arthur* is the last book dedicated to anonymous patrons that Caxton published, while the names could have been completely left out (Blake, *Caxton and His World* 95). It is possible that because patronage was good for business, Caxton continued his practice and tried to find new patrons after Richard came to power (hence the dedication to the latter in *Order of Chivalry*). After the defeat of Richard III at Bosworth, Caxton turned to Henry VII and referred to him as "the most Christian king, my natural and sovereign lord" in the prologue to *The Fayts of Arms*, and openly mentioned Rivers's name in the third edition of the latter's *Dictes* in 1489 (Childs 170–72).

The following argument I would like to propose could well be a stretch too far, but it is possible that Caxton might not be completely chameleonic and at least on one occasion he revealed his political stance inadvertently. Two of the most common phrases Caxton uses to call his patrons are "most Christian king" and "our natural and sovereign lord," and in his prayers he often wishes for eternal bliss after the transitory life in this world. In his epilogue to *Charles the Great*, he refers to Edward IV, who died recently, as "the noble and moost Crysten kyng, our naturel and soverayn lord" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 68).[96] In the epilogue to *Charles the Great*, Caxton prays for everlasting bliss after this transitory life for both his patrons, William Daubeney and Edward IV ("noble and moost Crysten kyng, our naturel and soverayn lord late of noble memorye"), and himself (68). In *Siege of Jerusalem*, Caxton continues his usual practice and at the end of the prologue he adds a dedication to his patron Edward "in alle his empryses gloryous vaynquysshour, happy and

[95] On the other hand, Blake is quite certain that the Winchester manuscript was not the one Caxton used (*Caxton and His World* 109).
[96] For Caxton's patronage from the Yorkists, especially Edward IV, see Kekewich (481–87).

eurous . . . our naturel, lawful and soverayn lord and moost Cristen kynge" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 141). He even proposes that a tenth Worthy be added so that either of Edward IV's sons who might be motivated by this book to participate in crusades for the two common purposes Caxton often prescribes for his publications: eternal fame and blissful heavenly life. The eternal life in heaven after transitory life on earth is further promised to whoever joins the crusade. In his epilogue to *Feats of Arms*, Caxton addresses Henry VII as "the most Crysten kynge and redoubted prynce, my naturel and soverayn lord" (81). Later, once again calling Henry "the hiest and most Cristen kyng and prince of the world" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 82), Caxton wishes that "[Henry] may have victorie, honour and renommee to his perpetual glorye" because no other monarch has subdued his subjects "with lasse hurte et cetera" and offered help to neighbours and friends. Because of his leniency, Henry may "remayne alleway vyctoryous and dayly encreace fro vertu to vertue and fro better to better to his laude and honour" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 83) in both this transitory life and the blissful afterlife.

After having identified the norm of Caxton's mode of address, then it is interesting to observe that in his dedication to Richard III in *The Order of Chivalry*, although he in general follows the same formulae seen elsewhere, such as "redoubted, naturel and most dradde soverayne lord" and the wish for the king's blissful life in heaven "after this short and transitory lyf" (*Caxton's Own Prose* 127), he does not call Richard "the most Christian king" but only wishes him to defeat all his enemies. Could it be that here Caxton is silently protesting against the latter's wrongdoings? From the little information we have about Caxton's life, it is, and probably will continue to be, difficult to make a definitive answer, and scholars would have different interpretations of the extant sources.

No matter with which group in contemporary political struggles Caxton

may have chosen to take sides, one thing is certain. Judging from the prologues and epilogues to some of his most representative chivalric publications, we can conclude that Caxton does not place the religious aspects of knighthood in the foreground, let alone the passive way of imitating Christ. The majority of the English aristocracy in his time were not interested in, or did not have the adequate intellectual tools for, speculation into the religious aspects of the chivalric ethos. The traits Caxton underlines, therefore, are generally those more easily identifiable with the professional requirements of a warrior, such as prowess and courage. The ideal of the *imitatio*, with the few references to Christ's sacrifice and Jerusalem, only served as the backdrop to the one form that Caxton's readers might readily think of and identify themselves with, crusades.

4.5 Conclusion

From all of the treatises on the ideal of chivalry so far examined in this chapter, we might draw the conclusion that in late medieval England, the chivalric ideal as presented by non-literary texts with practical concerns seems very different from that in *Le Morte* and *Piers Plowman*. In the first group of texts, it is military prowess, worldly honour, and courage in battle that are underlined, and there are only a few passing references to, let alone emphases on, the importance of doing penance. The passive and patient mode of the *imitatio Christi*, which features prominently in the stories of Lancelot and Conscience, and which is perhaps how most contemporary liberal-minded people would now understand the ideal, is in a subordinate position in these texts. The authors and readers of chivalric treatises chose the aspects of chivalry that were more identifiable and applicable for them instead of rigorous renouncement of the world. Such treatises are more cases of conventional piety rather than expressions of the *imitatio Christi*. The ideal of imitating Christ does occupy a central position in crusading propaganda, though. The just violence theories, which can be directly traced back to the authority of Scripture, laid the foundation for the theoretical preparations needed before crusades could be carried out. Probably because of the traumatic experience the human race has had in the twentieth century and as a consequence a general abhorrence of war, crusades have been widely regarded as at variance with the true Christian spirit. However, we need to acknowledge that crusading was justified in terms of contemporary standards instead of "[confining it] to a distant past, airbrushing it so effectively from postmedieval history that we have forgotten how recently it can be identified" (Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* 44).

This chapter is by no means a comprehensive study, but a selective examination of several exemplary cases. There are several limitations that I

hope will open up spaces for further enquiries. The first is the selection of the texts: while they are not completely randomly chosen as I have explained my criteria in the introductory parts of each section, their selection is not done systematically. The main reason for choosing them as the key texts in this chapter is that they were either written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries or, for an earlier text such as Llull's, printed in that period (with the exception of St. Bernard, who influenced the whole history of Christianity after him). Not much has been said about the use and influence of these texts, which would require the collection of comprehensive data on the circulation and annotation of manuscripts and later, their printing history. I also intend to make no claim about whether and how contemporary warfare has impacted the authors' views on the imitation of Christ for knights, although in general because medieval warfare tended to have a relatively minimal impact on the population at large, for those who were not directly involved life would not be greatly disturbed. Even in Charny and Pizan it is difficult for the reader to sense much anxiety and misgiving. Finally, while I am aware that there might be differences between English and French attitudes towards war and the ideal of imitating Christ for knights, it is not my wish to undertake a comparative study of situations across the English Channel.[97] However, my assumption is that whatever the national differences, England and France shared a common culture, and therefore such differences are inconsequential in the consideration of chivalric ideals in these two countries.

[97] It might be helpful to recall that Caxton did remove Pizan's criticism of English knights to suit his readers' taste. However, he chose to translate and publish many French texts after all, an act attesting to their affinity with English culture.

Chapter 5. Coda: the *Imitatio Christi* Reconsidered

> [Casaubon:] "My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes."
>
> –George Eliot, *Middlemarch* 18

> Dorothea's faith supplied all that Mr. Casaubon's words seemed to leave unsaid: what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put into it, and even his bad grammar is sublime."
>
> –George Eliot, *Middlemarch* 50

In the final chapter of my thesis, I aim to both summarize my arguments in the previous chapters and consider how the examination of various accounts of knights' imitating Christ that were popular in late medieval England might contribute to our knowledge of the right way to understand the past. I took the liberty of quoting from George Eliot's masterpiece because the two epigraphs in fact reveal the underlying mechanisms at work in both medieval authors' and modern readers' perception of not only the ideal of the *imitatio*, but history in general.

Casaubon's aim is ambitious and noble indeed, but his ignorance of previous studies on ancient mythology already undertaken by German scholars results in his pitiable (or even deserved) failure. It is time to look at Casaubon's lament on his fruitless academic career at a deeper level. One might be tempted to ask, is it even a feasible task at all to construct the past "as it used to be?" And if the past can actually be fully reconstructed, how do we manage to achieve that goal? Or if it proves impossible, how should we approach the past in studying ancient materials? The ideal of the *imitatio* makes an excellent case with which I can discuss some principles in dealing with texts that were composed in societies very different from our own.

A historian must be cautious about drawing conclusions. In his seminal work *A Preface to Chaucer*, D. W. Robertson believes that a better understanding of the medieval (and the past in general) can be achieved only

when we do not rush to judgements. If we assume the validity of our own attitudes for all times, he argues, “we turn history into a mirror which is of significance to us only insofar as we may perceive in it what appear to be foreshadowings of ourselves,” and which, however, is only a reconstruction of the past on the basis of our own values (3). Robertson is not alone in warning us of the danger of looking at the past through present-day lenses. After speaking of the naïvety of blindly accepting historical evidence or scepticism on principle, Marc Bloch in *The Historian’s Craft* comments that “the criticism of ordinary common sense, for long the only one in use, and still somehow seductive to certain minds, cannot lead very far” (67). For Bloch, common sense is “nothing more than a compound of irrational postulates and hastily generalized experiences”(67), and this is what Robertson claims would turn the critique of history into our own reflection.

Immensely popular religious treatises on the ideal of the *imitatio*, such as Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, “the most widely read devotional work ever written” after the Bible (Miola 285), often advocate virtues of peace, patience and humility. The modern reader, familiar with this approach to imitating Christ, might be baffled when they read about medieval knights who enjoyed thrills of war yet still claim themselves as Christ’s followers (similar sentiments are at the foundation of the rejection of crusades as deviating from the true Christian spirit, which has been discussed previously).

As Skinner notes in his *Regarding Method*, Classical rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian argue that for many virtues there are counterpart vices (184). As a consequence, the advocates of a new ideology often resort to the technique of paradiastolic redescription, that is, using a positive term to refer to something with a related meaning in order to justify their claims that used to be unacceptable to social norms. Seeing crusaders slaughtering infidels in the name of God, the modern, often liberal-minded,

reader might have feelings not unlike those expressed in Nietzsche's famous diatribe against Christian feebleness in his *On the Genealogy of Morals:*[1]

> Weakness is being lied into something meritorious . . . and impotence which does not requite into 'goodness of heart'; anxious lowliness into 'humility'; subjection to those one hates into 'obedience'. . . The inoffensiveness of the weak man, even the cowardice of which he has so much, his lingering at the door, his being ineluctably compelled to wait, here acquire flattering names, such as 'patience,' and are even called virtue itself; his inability for revenge is called unwillingness to revenge, perhaps even forgiveness ('for *they* know not what they do—we alone know what *they* do!') They also speak of 'loving one's enemies'—and sweat as they do so (47).

While we might agree with Nietzsche that characters in medieval literature can sometimes be too pliable to be suitable *exempla* (consider Chaucer's poor Griselda enduring her husband's sadistic behaviour), in the case of knights and kings it is often the other way around—the excessive violence in their actions that medieval authors call gallantry, for instance, sometimes makes it difficult to justify them being also called "just" or "merciful." In such medieval works, the modern reader instead would often encounter kingly/knightly qualities that do not square with his/her own perception of the ideal of the *imitatio*, or *exempla* that make weak cases for the virtues they are meant to illustrate. The easiest way to solve this interpretative issue, of course, is to declare that all those authors who do not base their theory of the ideal king/knight on the *imitatio* ideal as the reader understands it are hypocritical propagandists merely paying lip service to the ideal.

However, in our age where the grand narrative of history as progressive is

[1] A fuller quotation of the passage can be found in Skinner (185).

increasingly doubted, one cannot help but question if it is possible that such a large number of orthodox (sometimes also popular) authors in the past turned out to be immoral or hypocritical. A scholar should not be a judge in historical matters, and unfortunately people often forget that even a value judgement's *raison d'être* is dependent on "an action and a meaning solely in relation to a system of consciously accepted moral references" (Bloch 115).[2] In fact such judgments are highly variable, "subject to all the fluctuations of collective opinion or personal caprice, history, by all too frequently preferring the compilation of honor rolls to that of notebooks" (Bloch 116).

Another possible reason for the authors not meeting the modern reader's expectations might be that they were under pressure to express opinions that were favourable to those in power or to suit themselves to other conditions. A simple use of Occam's razor shows that this answer adds an unnecessary assumption: unless there is clear evidence that some medieval writers tended to glamorize knightly/kingly behaviour that is at odds with Christian teaching, they should be seen as sincere. Skinner believes that we should not think that the authors were pretending when they wrote the texts, and it is fatal for a historian to judge which beliefs were false and enquire the social functions or psychological pressure that could have induced the failure to recognize their falsity. This, Skinner claims, is "supplying them with beliefs instead of identifying what they believed" (51). Skinner's golden rule, as a consequence, is to see the agents of such beliefs as being as rational as possible (40). We

[2] In the general editor's foreword to *The Debate on the Crusades*, R. C. Richardson writes that "No historian . . . [can] stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of the ever-changing present . . . Though historians address the past as their subject they always do so in ways that are shaped . . . by the society, cultural ethos, politics and systems of their own day" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* x). Writing history, as a consequence, "is not a neutral revelation but a malleable, personal, contingent, cultural activity" (*The Debate on the Crusades* xi). Writing history, in essence, is an interpretation of texts.

must assume that the texts are relatively straightforward instead of being written in coded language, and initially we need to take the messages at face value. Marc Bloch chooses the single word "understanding" as the ultimate principle of historical studies, yet at the same time he acknowledges its difficulty, even impossibility, because understanding "is so easy to denounce. We are never sufficiently understanding" (119).

Barbara Herrnstein Smith's theory of the contingencies of values is also useful here.[3] She argues that the so-called intrinsic value is constructed by a series of contingent factors, and those which serve the desired functions of an age are best preserved, so that "when the value of a work is seen as unquestionable, those of its features that would, in a noncanonical work, be found alienating . . . will be glozed over or backgrounded. In particular, features that conflict intolerably with the ideologies of subsequent subjects (and, in the West, with those generally benign 'humanistic' values for which canonical works are commonly celebrated) . . . will be repressed or rationalized" (Smith 49).[4] Because chivalric manuals and crusade propaganda convey messages from a warrior culture, they are less likely to be used as sources for the medieval understanding of the *imitatio*.

We have already seen that for knights (and all Christians) there are two ways of imitating Christ, which can be very crudely labelled as "active" and "passive," represented by crusade propaganda/chivalric manuals and penitential romance respectively. Their greatest differences lie in the attitudes

[3] In fact in recent studies of the crusades "contingency and the equality of experience tended to replace the patterned, predictive and hierarchic schemes of Whig or Marxists" (Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* 206).

[4] Kate Langdon Forhan, in her introduction to Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Body Politic*, mentions that the "moral" of the *exempla* in her work may differ from the one the modern reader would draw: "Some of Christine's stories of trickery in part II would seem to us unethical, yet Christine's audience might not have found them inconsistent with honor" (xviii).

towards violence, wealth, and chastity, especially the first two. While in the *Sankgreal* and *Piers Plowman* knights, if they are to follow Christ, are often required to completely renounce sexual pleasures and worldly riches, as well as to remain as pacifist as possible, the authors of chivalric manuals usually require temperance in these matters at most, and while crusade propagandists like St. Bernard propose an ascetic knighthood, they see justified violence as the road to salvation rather than damnation. Scholars often view the "passive" mode as dominant in the Late Middle Ages, and the changes in attitudes towards violence are attributed to the influence of forces that took effect over a long period. However, two pairs of texts are evidence that texts carrying starkly different messages might emerge from similar social contexts. It is dangerous to presuppose any explanation, because "[whether] confronted by a phenomenon of the physical world or by a social fact, the movement of human reactions is not like clockwork always going in the same direction" (Bloch 162). Also, belief, far from being something static, is constantly changing and full of vigour and tension. It is "a never completed activity, one that is precarious, always questioned, and inseparable from recurrences of doubt" (Schmitt 7). No other aspect of human activity than attitudes towards warfare, the most radical form of violence, makes a better case for such contingencies.

The first pair has been discussed by Norman Housley.[5] In late medieval Bohemia, attitudes towards war could vary greatly regardless of the religious belief held by those expressing them.[6] Nicholas of Pelhřimov accepts holy wars as long as they are fought for a just cause and according to certain

[5] For details, see Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536* 160–89.
[6] For most critics of religious warfare, "it was a matter of steering a difficult course between ideals and reality. [For Erasmus], it was painful to entrust a holy cause to men who would certainly be woefully deficient as its agents." (Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536* 188)

limits.[7] His contemporary Peter Chelčický, on the other hand, advocates a total condemnation of violence. The reason for the difference, as Housley pungently points out, is not in the degree of radicalness or firmness of conviction, but is "because [Peter Chelčický] associated warfare with the very regime which he opposed, and with the spiritual evil which underpinned it" (Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536* 170). Shared Christian belief, even within a short span of time, does not necessarily generate similar views on various issues.

The second pair of texts were written only a few year apart in the Renaissance. While most of the chivalric treatises and Caxton's advertisement of chivalric literature clearly show a high degree of pragmatism, the ideal of the *imitatio* kept its allure to Renaissance authors. After all, according to Pelikan, "the very concept and name Renaissance [came] into the vocabulary of European civilization principally through the teachings of Jesus" that the original goodness of human nature must be restored (145–46). The pacifist Erasmus in *The Education of a Christian Prince* fervently claims, "What must be implanted deeply and before all else in the mind of the prince is the best possible understanding of Christ; he should be constantly absorbing his teachings . . . Let him become convinced of this, that what Christ teaches applies to no one more than to the prince" (13). Erasmus condemns both the justification of dynastic and national warfare and the crusade. What he refers to as *philosophia Christi*, the messages conveyed by Christ's life and teachings, is incompatible with the very idea of the holy war. And as a consequence, he must dismiss the traditional methods of scholastic exegesis,

[7] It should be noted that Nicholas of Pelhřimov's demands on holy warriors that they should be humble and patient, live in a clean way, have the right intention, obey God's command, hate vices, and imitate the life of Christ, which are on a par with those imposed on the Templars and displayed by exemplary knights in the literary works already examined, are unrealistic. Pacifism doubtless would not work, either.

and he even went as far as to deny the authority of figures such as Augustine and Bernard, when their doctrines on the justification of violence are at odds with what he regarded as a correct reading of the Bible.[8] At about the same time, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, which advocates qualities that often do not meet modern expectations of Christian ethics. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the possibility that such behaviour was acceptable to the Christians at that time. One could even take a step further and ask whether it might be possible that for these authors being "Christian" had a different meaning from the one it has today.[9]

Such contingencies are seen in texts with similar views of imitating Christ. As the introductory chapter shows, within the "passive" category many kinds of behaviour are considered as signs of imitating Christ's humility and patience. Malory (and his sources) and Langland choose to highlight the qualities that best suit their respective purposes. Because the Grail quest is mainly one for personal salvation, the more "personal" virtues such as chastity and willingness to do penance are highlighted, while wealth and violence are not strictly excluded from an ideal chivalric life. On the other hand, with social justice being one of Langland's central concerns, he stresses qualities such as voluntary poverty and calls for the abolishment of the use of force.

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[8] For Erasmus's pacifism, see Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400-1536* 176.

[9] Skinner offers a fine example of such differences in the way Machiavelli uses the term *virtù*. It is often regarded that sometimes he uses the word in the traditional Christian sense, and on other occasions it may refer to skill in political or military affairs. Therefore in Machiavelli the word has no fixed meaning at all. What is wrong with this approach, Skinner argues, is that "Machiavelli may have been using the term with perfect consistency to express a concept so alien to our own moral thought that we cannot nowadays hope to capture it except in the form of an extended and rather approximate periphrasis" (48). It is quite possible that the meaning of *virtù* is not coterminous with the English word virtue, and by this word Machiavelli is actually referring to whatever is good for gaining political or military advantage. Similarly, the modern reader may not fully imagine the degree to which chivalric ideals and norms were debated in France during the Hundred Years' War because the word chivalry is often used in a romantic way in modern English (Taylor ix).

The two traditions are so intertwined that even when in principle violence is denounced in the *Sankgreal* and *Piers Plowman*, it is often portrayed as necessary in these two works. The genre of chivalric romance means that some action must be involved. Galahad, no matter how spiritualized he is, often has to defeat enemies by force, and Christ himself is seen to joust on two occasions (no matter how spiritualized the jousts are) in *Piers Plowman*. In fact, sometimes when knights do not use violence, justice fails to be upheld and social order is disrupted. Bors's hesitation to fight Lionel causes the deaths of two innocent men who try to protect the former from his sinful brother; Perceval's sister's voluntary sacrifice is only for the recovery of a wicked noblewoman who is soon punished in an act of divine retribution, and the three Grail knights at least in this one case choose to avoid conflict instead of protecting the innocent. Similar examples are seen in *Piers Plowman*. In the half-acre episode the knight, with nothing but his feeble threat that is never carried out, fails to fulfil his promise to protect the harvest from the Waster; at the end of the poem, because Conscience grows soft for a hypocritical friar, Unity is undermined with Christ being the only source of aid left. Christ does not have to resort to violence because he is able to bring about moral and spiritual reforms in sinners, a power clearly denied to mortal knights. Even medieval romancers cannot entirely discard the fact that in reality violence was always an essential part of the chivalric life, and knights often had to fulfil their social obligations by fear and force, as both Charny and Llull have argued. The allegorical mode of knights' *imitatio* only works in fictional settings: nowhere could people in the Middle Ages find a Holy Grail that contains the key to human salvation and a solution to all their more urgent problems such as war and the Black Death; in a crumbling society not unlike Unity under attack, there was no Piers Plowman who would come to aid, solving all social issues and restoring order. The authors of the chivalric

manuals understood the necessity of human agency.[10] They did not, and could not, solely depend on God's intervention for success in military operations. In addition, at the expense of innumerable lives and other losses, human history has taught us too well that paradoxically, sometimes in order to maintain peace, war must be prepared for, a concept probably also familiar to medieval people. To reconcile violence and Christian ideals of peace and charity, the authors in general had to resort to two approaches. The first is the development of theories of just war, which in the Middle Ages culminated in their most radical forms as illustrated by crusading ideology. The second approach, emphasizing conventional prowess and courage as compatible to the Christian faith, depends on the first for its justification of violence, but it is of a more secular and moderate nature. Even in the literary texts the efforts of renouncing the world for the sake of attaining celestial knighthood are presented as limited, with the success to a large extent restricted to attaining promises of individual salvation (Lancelot's death marks the end of the Arthurian court and Conscience fails in defending Unity). Furthermore, by renouncing the world, one is supposed to sever one's connections with it, making involvement in its affairs a tricky issue. Surveying the efforts medieval people made in order to reconcile imitating Christ and violence, a pair of seemingly impossible combinations, or to neglect the discrepancies between them, might help us to better understand the on-going debates about the relationship between violence and religious beliefs, an issue highly relevant to the entire human race today.

It is time to return to the beginning of this chapter and re-examine

[10] It seems that how much advice from chivalric manuals was actually taken is questionable. Leyerle comments that "Prudent men did not practice chivalry in a battle. Chivalry was not for the battle field, but for ceremonial activities of aristocratic society . . . when a noble or prince wished to display magnificence, a characteristic that included his power and strength, or *fortitudo*, without much personal risk . . . chivalry belongs to the history of ideas and its main record is in literary texts" (143).

Casaubon's lofty goal. Even if we have managed to exercise our maximum capacity for understanding, placed all texts in their contexts intertextually, and studied all the aspects of the materials, does this mean we have successfully reconstructed the past as it really was? The answer, unfortunately, is perhaps still no, and we might never achieve that goal.

When we try to understand history, a process which Hans-Georg Gadamer terms as "fusion of horizons" takes place. In *Truth and Method* he suggests that "the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices . . . There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*" (317). Our understanding of the present is an on-going spiral process, as is that of the past, and Gadamer believes that the understanding of one depends on the other, denying the existence of an impassable rift between the past and the present. When we interpret historical texts, surely we will experience the tension between the texts and the present, and instead of covering it up with the formation of a single horizon, the historical consciousness, "something superimposed upon continuing tradition" (317), foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own, which is immediately recombined with itself to achieve a state of unity. To assume that one can think only in the terms of the age to be understood, Gadamer claims, is a naïve thought, not because the interpreter will never be able to displace himself sufficiently, but because "*To think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo* when we try to think in them" (415), which, however, does not mean that interpretation is random and subjective, but the trajectories of past concepts to the present must be grasped in the process. In every act of interpretation we cannot help but to reconstruct the past, because "We cannot

avoid thinking about what the author accepted unquestioningly and hence did not consider, and bringing it into the openness of the question . . . If the "historical" question emerges by itself, this means that it no longer arises as a question . . . Part of real understanding, however, is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them" (Gadamer 382). By reconstructing the questions which a certain text answers, we are actually fusing it with our own understanding, and only in this way is understanding a historical text made possible. That is to say, the interpretation of historical texts is in fact dependent on the reader's personal standpoint/biases, and no understanding of the past can be gained without them.

As a consequence, our understanding of what the *imitatio Christi* refers to is influenced by our own thinking, which is to say, that "the models and preconceptions in terms of which we unavoidably organize and adjust our perceptions and thoughts will themselves tend to act as determinants of what we think and perceive" (Skinner 58). At first we saw versions of the *imitatio* that are at variance with its popular modern connotations. If we do not hastily jump to conclusions and declare the medieval authors were wrong, but instead take a look at the entire trajectory of the evolution of the ideal, then we find that not only are there two traditions that have co-existed for thousands of years, but in medieval works these two traditions are often intermingled. In this way we also better grasp its complexity not only in the Middle Ages, but also in our own time.

Medieval authors have two different versions of imitating Christ because they decided to adopt different interpretative strategies[11] that had been

[11] Different texts, Stanley Fish argues, do not necessary give rise to different interpretative strategies. It is the reader's disposition that decides which strategy(ies) are adopted, and "the notions of the 'same' or 'different' texts are fictions" (482). By

passed down to them from the origin of Christianity, which are ultimately traced back to the tensions within the Bible itself. The tensions are always present at the centre of Judaeo-Christian tradition between Yahweh the militant God and Christ the Prince of Peace. There are many factors for any particular stance the authors chose to take, and the authors themselves select their own interpretive approaches with different degrees of success (seeing the authors as immoral, of course, is also an interpretive strategy). While it is impossible for us to reconstruct a "pure" past in which these texts were produced, from them we can still learn many things. It is by examining how past generations viewed the ideal of the *imitatio*, how we perceive the ideal, and how our view of the ideal might have influenced our understanding of the past, that we not only better comprehend the ideal itself, but also gain a deeper insight into the unchangeability of human changeability.

Finally, from the perspective of a cynical observer, due to the inherent tensions in the Bible, and because "the powerful in any age attempt to co-opt religion as justification for their lives, their characteristic work, and their social dominance" (Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* 20), it seems that the elite usually had enough elbow room to label their behaviour as conforming to the *imitatio Christi*. In this way, the ideal indeed "expands for whatever we can put into it." The imitator, as a consequence, becomes the imitated.

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emphasizing different and often contradictory points in a certain text, one is able to bend the text according to one's own wishes, outside constraints permitting. Fish later contends that "any interpretive program, any set of interpretative strategies, can have a similar success [to Augustine's interpreting everything as a sign of God's love for mankind and thus human beings' responsibility to love fellow creatures]" (483). Such is human nature. We can never confidently say that we already know everything about ourselves but can only choose among the answers available to us.

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