The Expression of Catholic Culture in Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur

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THE EXPRESSION OF CATHOLIC CULTURE

IN

SIR THOMAS MALORY'S LE MORTE D'ARTHUR

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The period of Middle English literature is one of great interest and great importance to the scholar of every age. Most important, however, among the elements for the complete understanding of this period is a correct evaluation of religion in the lives of the people. The study of history can tell us a good deal about religion's sway; a glance at the magnificent splendor of Gothic cathedrals and religious paintings and sculpture can tell us more. Literature, however, written in the period, not on the period, is our richest source of knowledge. There are two classes of this literature which have been used to describe for us the religion of the Middle Ages: first, the strictly and consciously religious pieces written by the priests and nuns which strive to drive home the doctrines and moral teachings of the Church. And second, the derogatory and savagely satirical works carping at the evils which are existing, not because of Christianity, but despite it. An example of the first class of this literature would be the \textit{Ancren Riwe}, or Aelfric's Sermons. As examples of the second type, \textit{Piers Plowman}, or the \textit{Land of Cockaygne} could be cited.

It is apparent, however, that neither of these two classes,
separately (and sometimes not even conjointly), is able to furnish a trustworthy basis for judging the customs of the Faith of the Middle Ages as actually practiced by Christian folk. Therefore, in order to strike a balance between what are possibly undue extremes of an idealistic picture of religion on the one hand, and an exaggerated picture of corruption on the other, this thesis will endeavor to point out, in a neutral piece of Medieval English literature, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the unconscious portrayals (included merely as incidentals to the main plot) of religion as practiced by the upper class laity.

We can hardly say that Malory in his *Le Morte D'Arthur* was out to "sell" religion, or to castigate his fellow men, through his re-doing of the French romances. He knew the England of his own fifteenth century as a degenerate England, and he longed for the strong ideals of by-gone days.¹ The memories of the former glories of hardy men are constantly before his pensive eyes. That these men were staunch Christians, loving God and their neighbor, living and praying hard, were but commonplaces of life to Malory.² He included their pious customs in his story as details which rounded out the picture of life as he and his contemporaries knew their ancestors had lived it. It was an unstudied attempt

on his part to give a true picture. Only because Catholicity was so much a part of his characters does it appear in the pages of his book. Caxton summed up what one can find in the work:

Wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry, ...courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin.

More strength will be given to our thesis if we consider the work done already along these lines by Mother Mary Norbert in her dissertation entitled, The Reflection of Religion in English Medieval Verse Romances. The purpose of this scholarly work was to mine from seventy-seven verse romances as many references as possible to religious worship as practiced by the characters. None of the romances chosen were specifically denoted as didactic pieces, but were selected for their neutrality. In order to cover completely all religious practices and functions, Mother Norbert divided her research under various headings: e.g., dependence of the individual on God; reception of the sacraments (a major portion of her work); hearing of Mass; participation in the Divine Office; the individual and prayer, pious devotions, such as devotion to the Holy Cross and other sacred objects;

4 Mother Mary Norbert, The Reflection of Religion in English Medieval Verse Romances, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, 1941, passim.
burial of the dead; the place of the liturgical year in the lives of the characters. With painstaking care and all but exhaustive documentation the author gradually builds up a convincing array of data. She proves not by syllogistic reasoning but by accumulated facts that the religion of the characters in the verse romances was not a religion of vague sentiment, but a sacramental plan of life with duties and responsibilities. The characters, restricted mainly to the upper classes of knights and their ladies, are seen thinking of God, depending on God, referring acts of worship to God; they honor their clergy; they love the Church; they accept her ministrations freely and gladly; Mass and Matins loom large in their everyday lives, but especially during the seasons of Christmas and Whitsuntide. We clearly see how they emphasize their love and duty to Christ, and to Mary His Mother.

The method used by Mother Norbert in her work has been followed with some alterations in this thesis. We will divide our findings under the heads of sacraments, sacramentals, the prayer-life of the characters, and their devotion to the Blessed Virgin. These points we think are sufficient to bring out clearly the sacramental life of the characters as an expression of their Catholic culture. We will work, however, in but one prose romance, Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, ample proving ground, we believe, for our purpose. We will go further, once we have
gathered our data, and strive to show that these reflections of religion are an expression of a deeply rooted Catholic culture, rooted in the sacramental life of the characters. We will show that the sacraments served to strengthen the characters of the Morte at every turn along their path of life. No sooner is a child born than the saving waters of Baptism are poured over his tiny brow. Penance, the other giver of sanctifying grace, washes sin from the souls of the knights and leaves them fortified for future struggles with sin. True, some of them will fall again; but we will see them struggling to rise anew, strengthened once more with Christ's grace. The Holy Eucharist, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, will be clearly and abundantly seen as an integral part of a knight's everyday life. Many of the characters, too, will be seen taking Holy Orders and Matrimony; and those who are dying will cry out for Christ's graces to be poured on them in the sacrament of Extreme Unction. In brief, we shall see the knights at the "filling stations" of grace, as it were, which God has prepared for them along life's route, strengthening and refreshing their weary souls. We shall see their Catholic culture sub specie sacramenti.

Almost all commentators on Malory and his work have failed to stress this richly religious note. One critic, however, J.M. Stone, in a chapter of his Studies from Court and Cloister, favorably contrasts the Morte on the point of religion with its
later and more popular off-spring, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. But this comparison, a short one, does not exhaust the picture of the sacramental life as lived by the characters in the *Morte*. Other critics, Scofield and Scudder, for example, prefer to laud the chivalric code of knighthood as seen portrayed in the pages of the romance. And the more recent commentators, Read, Vinaver, Lang, Sommers, Kittridge, and Baugh, prefer to delve into the problems of the biography of Malory's life, and the various source materials of the *Morte*. To my knowledge, no one has striven to show the characters of the romance as the true Catholics they are.

Such, then, is our problem and the material with which we will work. A true understanding of the religious practices of the Middle Ages in England cannot be found complete in the strictly didactic works of the time; we must also search for such expression in the unconscious manifestation of religion among the characters of secular romance. We have seen, from the brief of Mother M. Norbert's work, that there is a strong infusion of Catholics elements, stemming from strong faith and fairly faithful practice, in the verse romances of the Middle Ages; that this infusion is the more genuinely convincing because it is a relatively unconscious betrayal; that it manifests itself chiefly in regard to the sacraments and sacramentals of the Catholic

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Church; that it manifests what may be called the sacramental view of life, a view in which the necessity of a life habitually, or at least occasionally, nourished by the inward grace of Christ, of which the sacraments are an outward sign, is taken for granted and suffuses the narratives of the exemplars of heroism in the Middle Ages. All of this we shall find in the Le Morte D'Arthur, and interpret it as an expression of Catholic culture.

Our procedure will be as follows: first, we shall consider culture, especially Catholic culture, at some length, this consideration forming a substantial portion of the thesis. Then we shall apply our derived notions of Catholic culture to the Morte in the following two chapters, and cite the more richly significant passages which will bring out the sacramental life of the characters. A brief summary and interpretation of the main points seen will be offered in the concluding chapter.
CHAPTER II
A CONSIDERATION OF CATHOLIC CULTURE

First, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon culture in itself. This word is derived from the same root (Latin colere - to till, cultivate) as the words "cultus" and "cult". The dictionary definitions of these three words give material for a first and, I believe, allowable distinction. "Cult...a particular ritual or system of worship," as opposed to "Cultus...a system of religious doctrine." The latter is, then, the theory or body of beliefs, the inner meaning or truth; cult is the practice or worship associated with, or stemming from, or symbolic of that cultus, or those beliefs.

Culture itself, while primarily concerned with "animals, plants, or the like," especially with a view to improvement, has as its secondary and (for us) more pertinent definition "the training of the mental or moral powers, or the result of such training as shown in intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual development." Presumably, or even logically, such cultivation

2 Ibid., Winston, "Culture" 5. Also College Standard, "Culture" 2.
would be according to the accepted theory and practice of the individual or group. That theory may be, and in history often has been, religious (sometimes including the superstitious), or social (sometimes including the economic), or moral (ethical, - sometimes including codes and manners not the result of any religious teachings). Sometimes it has been a fusion of one or two of these, or of all three, usually with one predominating. The logical procession, then, would be: from cultus (inner meaning, theory, principles, doctrine), to cult (practice, or expression in action, usually worship) to culture (i.e., the extension of cultus and cult into improvement and refinement in the wider sense: intellectual, moral, and aesthetic).

Among responsible writers on this subject we find many echoes and confirmations of the above, sometimes in the same, sometimes in equivalent, terms. The first to be noted are those who establish the relation between civilization and culture. The majority of German, Polish and Russian savants hold that civilization is a part of culture; most English and American writers, on the other hand, prefer to say that culture is a part of civilization.

Secondly might be noted those who establish the ordinary elements found in culture. C.S. Devas affords a bulky beginning:

Civilization is most conveniently described as the condition of a large group of men displaying the following seven characteristics: First, the possession of a city worthy of the name; not the extended villages of the Germans described by Tacitus or of the Gauls till a short time before the Roman Conquest. Secondly, some degree of political order and power; not a clan system like that of the Scotch Highlanders described in *Waverly* and *Rob Roy*. Thirdly, some proficiency in the industrial arts, in agriculture, manufactures, mining, building and transport; not the rude culture of the Kaffirs in Mashonaland, the negroes in Nigeria, or the aboriginal tribes in the forests of Central India. Fourthly, some proficiency in the fine arts, in architecture, sculpture, painting and music; not the simple decorations of the royal palaces in Danomey of Ahsanti or the Celtic ornamentation in pre-Roman Britain. Fifthly, some knowledge of philosophy, history and physical science, above the standard of the peasant commonwealth of the fifteenth-century Swiss. Sixthly, a written literature; not the unwritten songs of the heroic age of poetry, such as the old Greek or Norse or Celtic epics. Seventhly, a small portion of the people differentiated as an upper class with considerable wealth and leisure; not the simple quality of the Red Indian tribes or the scanty difference of social position among pastoral peoples without settled abodes or accumulation of wealth. Again, these characteristics are clearly divisible into material and intellectual; the special word *culture*, though sometimes used for civilization in general, is often used for intellectual as distinct from material civilization, and is confined to proficiency in the fine arts, in literature, in histor-
The sociologists stress the elements in culture, too; as P.A. Sorokin, the famous exile Russian sociologist:

...the sum total of everything which is created or modified by the conscious or unconscious activity of two or more individuals interacting with one another or conditioning one another's behavior.6

But another sociologist, S. Winston, is very vague in his attempt at definition:

Culture may be considered as the totality of material and non-material traits, together with their associated behavior patterns, plus the language usages which a society possesses.7

W.D. Wallis, although a sociologist, has written his books mainly from an anthropological viewpoint. His definition is:

Culture...may be defined as the artificial objects, institutions, and modes of life or of thought which are not peculiarly individual but which characterize a group.8

Fr. Ernest Hull, S.J., defines civilization as the means which essentially brings about social law. Everything else which this civilization embodies he calls "culture." To quote:

Culture...means the application of human faculties to some object. For from the point of view of the faculties we speak of mental culture, which includes all sustained and organized use of the intellect or the senses, and issues in knowledge or science; technical culture, which means the exercise of some industry or art; ethical culture, which means the appreciation of the beautiful in nature, manners, or in art; and finally, physical culture, which means the cultivation of the body and its movements. 9

Thirdly, among our writers on culture, we find those who include other elements as determinants of a culture, rather than as elements as such. Some include these elements implicitly, such as Jacques Maritain who defines culture thus:

Let our conclusion be that culture or civilization is the expansion of the peculiarly human life, including not only whatever material development may be necessary and sufficient to enable us to lead an upright life on this earth, but also and above all the moral development, the development of the speculative and practical activities (artistic and ethical), peculiarly worthy of being called human development. 10

Others mention these determinant elements explicitly; such as Christopher Dawson, who maintains that religion is the dynamic force of culture:

A culture is a common way of life—a particular adjustment of man to his natural surroundings and his economic needs.  

It is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force which unifies a society and a culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest. A society which has lost its religion becomes sooner or later a society which has lost its culture.

We...must realize that religion is not a matter of personal sentiment which has nothing to do with the objective realities of society, but is, on the contrary, the very heart of social life and the root of every living culture.

Another author, J.C. Shairp, is as strong as Dawson in maintaining that religion is the force of culture:

What the Greeks naturally expressed by their παιδεία, the Romans by their humanitas, we less happily try to express by the more artificial word culture...When applied to human beings, it means, I suppose, the "educating or drawing forth all that is potentially in man," the training of all the energies and capacities of his being to the highest pitch, and directing them to their true ends...What can be more ideal (an end) than that which religion sets

13 Christopher Dawson, Enquiries into Religion and Culture, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1933, x. Cf. also Dawson's Judgement of the Nations, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1942, 118. Sheed & Ward Publishing Co. has also prepared a pamphlet containing twelve selections on religion as the dynamic force in culture.
before us? "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."¹⁴

Fourthly, there are those who more emphatically insist on all the attributes cited by the above authors as elements in the formation of the relative completion which they look upon as culture's true aim or its proper perfection. Fr. Donat, S.J., for example, enters into culture in his Ethica Generalis:

Cultura est perfectio naturae humanae socialiter possessa.¹⁵

It is this perfectio that holds the key to the definition's meaning. The word must be distinguished into perfection or essential culture and again into accidental culture. Essential culture includes everything that enables man to live a life worthy of his position as a man. Thus would be contained a sufficiency of money, food, and everything that pertains to the ordinary life of a citizen. But especially does it include decency and religion. Accidental culture, on the other hand, should include those things which man can usually get along without, but which add dignity to his life. Such would be proficiency in science, arts, riches, and literature.

Fr. Robert E. Brennan, O.P., noted Dominican philosopher, heartily concurs with this definition of Fr. Donat's. He speaks

of culture in its active sense, including all the multifarious works - material, intellectual, and moral - that enter into its composition. He uses culture also in its objective sense to signify the whole complexus of goods that perfect human nature. These are the fruits, as it were, of active culture. Then there is subjective culture which is the actual possession of the goods that are understood to belong to human nature, i.e., a personal command over the physical, moral, and social accomplishments of humanity.16

Another Dominican, Rev. Bede Jarrett, O.P., comes very close to Shairp's statement as to the proper perfection of culture:

True culture is not a question of scientific attainments, or mechanical progress, or the discovery of new inventions of destruction, or even of medical and useful sciences; but it is the perfect and complete development of the latent powers of the soul. True culture may indeed make use of sciences and art; perhaps in its most complete sense science and art are needed for the most finished culture of which man is capable; but it is in its very essence the deepening of his truest desire, the full stretch of his evident flights of fancy, the achievements of his noblest ideals. What nobler ideal, or fancy, or strong desire, can a man have than to be called to be the son of God? To know that he has been drawn into the close union of God? "To be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect."17

There are some rather exclusive conceptions of the phenomenon of culture. Many modern philosophers, for instance, have taken a fling at defining this elastic word, but they inevitably fall back on Rousseau's error, or on a watery, wavering spiritualistic monism or pantheism. Maritain claims that those who hold with Rousseau that human nature is essentially good and is corrupted only by culture and civilization, are confusing the per accidens and the perseity of culture. Per accidens culture may corrupt certain men because human nature is weak and the elements of culture will be abused. But per se culture is something wanted naturally by man, and he is not fully a man unless he is striving for it.

Many literary definitions of culture make good reading but produce poor standards. "The study of perfection," says Matthew Arnold is the definition of culture. But, we ask, what is the perfection you speak of, and how can we attain it? Unfortunately, Arnold is silent on the point. T.S. Eliot pointedly says: "That culture and conduct are first things, we are told (by Arnold); but what culture and conduct are, I feel that I know less on every reading."

18 Donat, S.J., 40-1; 51-2.
19 Maritain, 5.
Thus we see the inclusiveness of culture as representing man, a creature destined to another life hereafter, who, at his best, is one who "sees life steadily and sees it whole," i.e., socially, intellectually and imaginatively (aesthetically), and spiritually (religiously). One or other of these elements may predominate, and give its character to the whole, e.g., the religious element in the culture of the Middle Ages (a motivation and unifying force for the intellectual and social); and the social element in class, "national," or group cultures, which can give a distinctive and recognizable tincture by which a culture comes to have the name of the group (e.g., negro culture in the present day and German culture at the turn of the century, in the United States). This national culture is a coming together of all the individual cultures, not as an accidental conglomeration, but as a convergentia in unum. A scattered collection of various individual and complex cultures, if merely piled together, could hardly make an integrated whole. Only socialiter is culture had in its fullness.

Culture, therefore, descriptively defined, would consist in man's improvement and development of his social, intellectual, and spiritual powers; it would result in a consistent searching in regard to the finest things that have been said and done in these spheres of the social, intellectual, and spiritual, with some endeavor to give expression to them. In a group, it would
consist in an order in which the pursuit of such improvement, expansion, and expression might progress. And a Catholic culture would be that in which the religious, or spiritual, element would be characteristically that of the Catholic religion and dominant enough to be the distinguishing or determining note among the other elements. As Fr. Allen P. Farrell, S.J., says:

The distinguishing mark of Catholic culture is that it evaluates all human experience in the complete perspective furnished by revelation and that it gives due prominence to those cultural achievements which, ceteris paribus, since they include both the natural and the supernatural are to be regarded as the most human accomplishments.

Hence, Catholic culture looks at life with the eyes of revelation; revelation is the measuring stick. And we can reduce revelation to its lowest common denominator by reducing the Catholic religion to its barest essentials. A glance into Nicholas Berdyaev's Bourgeois Mind gives us this essence:

The very essence of the Gospel is the seeking for God's kingdom: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God;" it is the very core of Christianity...Now to seek for the kingdom of God means to seek for perfect life, for the fullness of life, and everything that is true is part of that life.

Mr. J.C. Shairp also realized this when he wrote:

Culture must embrace religion and end in it...What can be more ideal than that religion sets before us? "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Immediately, however, we have a difficulty. Has Mr. Shairp identified religion with culture? Has he confused cultus with culture? Cultus is a religious system of doctrine. And is not seeking the Kingdom of God more an expression of a religious system, a cultus, than of culture? We must not identify these two. Catholic cultus and cult should be a noticeable animating force in culture; but they should not be the whole of culture.

What does this mean? Catholic cultus bids men, in the words of Christ, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of heaven." "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." It points to a divine grace as the means to this end, and the sacraments instituted by Christ as the means of attaining divine grace. The sacraments are the outward signs by which grace is conferred, restored, or increased in the soul, and the outward sign or symbol is the center of the liturgy of each sacrament. But once we come to liturgy - according to our definitions of cultus and cult - cultus (teaching) has passed over into the realm of cult (where worship of the faithful, at its highest, is centered in the liturgy, too). This worship and this liturgy concern the sacraments and their administration. And here we enter into the heart of Catholic culture.

23 Shairp, 29, 31.
The importance of belief in, and worship centered in, the sacraments, in any truly Catholic culture, can be seen from the following: the sacraments are outward signs or symbols of inward grace. Sincere belief in them, and devout worship arranged around them, keep alive the consciousness of the inner meanings which outward signs symbolize, the consciousness of another life, that of the spirit both here and hereafter, the consciousness of another world of which this is a token and symbol. It does not deny the reality of this world, but merely insists on its further meaning, the extension of this reality into the invisible. It is what we may call the visible leading into the invisible. This is the keynote of Catholic culture or Catholic expression in any of the arts.

The ideas expressed in the preceding paragraph are quite compact, and require a somewhat leisurely expansion and frequent documentation. The whole idea of this sacramental life can be treated under two headings: the sacraments themselves, and the sacramentals.

This unique sacramentalism has been designated by Karl Adam in his book, The Son of God, as a prime mark of Christianity, i.e., Catholicity. He states:

Christianity is not simply a revelation of God in things visible and human. In Christ the Divine enters into operation through his humanity. Theologians, therefore, rightly characterize the humanity of Jesus.
as an *instrumentum conjunctum*, as the perceptible, visible medium substantially united to the Eternal Word, through which God bestows his grace on us. It accords with the Sacramental primary essence of Christianity, that its individual blessings and graces also wear a visible cloak. Plainly visible is above all the sacred process by which the believer is once and for all made a member of Christ, namely, baptism. So, too, the mystery of our real and enduring union with the Head of the Body is visibly expressed in the Sacrament of His Flesh and Blood. It follows at once that the Christian Sacraments... were from the beginning a necessary part of the Sacramental essence of Christianity. To the *instrumentum conjunctum* of the humanity of Jesus there correspond the *sacramenta separata*, the visible signs of salvation. Over the relative importance and number of Sacraments there have arisen differences of teaching in the Christian body, but never has the essential connection with the visible appearance of Christ been doubted.24

The "blessings and graces" mentioned above by Karl Adam, which flow from Christ the prime visible medium, are the sacraments and sacramentals. A sacrament has been defined by the Church at the Council of Trent as: "...a visible sign of an invisible grace, instituted for our justification."25 Clearer, perhaps, is the definition learned by every Catholic school child:

A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace."26 Hence, we see that a sacrament is a thing subject to the senses. What are these "outward signs" mentioned in the definition? In Baptism, for example, the visible sign is the pouring of the water while uttering these solemn words: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In Confirmation it is the anointing with blessed oils, and the slight blow on the cheek. In the sacrament of Holy Orders it is the anointing of the hands, the imposition of the Bishop's hands, and the recitation of many prayers. And in the Sacrament of Penance it is the concrete behavior of the priest and penitent (i.e., the confessing of one's sins and the absolution spoken by the confessor), that symbolize the inflow of grace and the restoration of the individual to the friendship of God.27

A sacrament possesses by reason of its divine institution the power of signifying sanctity and justice, and of imparting both to the receiver. There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony, all of which have the power of giving grace _ex opere operato_ from the merits won by Jesus Christ by His death on Calvary.

26 _A Catechism of Christian Doctrine_, prepared by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, Benziger Brothers, New York, No. 2, 27.
However, only two of the sacraments give sanctifying grace, Baptism and Penance, because they take away sin and give new life to the soul; the other sacraments increase this sanctifying grace first given by Baptism and Penance.\textsuperscript{28} A great deal depends, too, on the disposition of the one receiving a sacrament whether or not the full effect will be had in his soul.

From what we have said of the sacraments, therefore, it is evident that the images of saints and the Blessed Virgin, crucifixes, holy water, blessed candles, the sign of the cross, rosaries, scapulars, ashes, and blessed palms cannot be called sacraments. These are sacramentals, i.e., things set apart or blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts, to increase devotion, and through these movements of the heart to remit venial sin.\textsuperscript{29} The chief differences between the sacraments and the sacramentals are: first, the sacraments were instituted by Christ Himself, and the sacramentals were instituted by the Church; second, the sacraments give or increase grace of themselves when no obstacle is placed in their way, whereas the sacramentals excite in us pious dispositions, by means of which we may obtain grace.\textsuperscript{30}

By way of anticipation, we may say here that the sacramentals

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 27-28.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 54.
\end{itemize}
with which we will be concerned in this thesis will be the sign of the cross, crucifixes, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin through the use of her images and rosary. However, there is another means of obtaining God's grace which is closely allied to the sacraments and sacramentals, and of which the characters of the Morte will be seen making full use, and that is prayer, both public and private. "Prayer is a lifting up of our minds and hearts to God to adore Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to ask His forgiveness, and to beg Him for all the graces we need whether for soul or body." When we consider this definition of prayer we can readily see why it is justifiably inserted as a parallel to the sacramentals.

By way of emphasis and summary we can again look to Karl Adam for corroboration, this time in his *Spirit of Catholicism*:

...the worship of the Church is not merely a filial remembrance of Christ, but a continual participation by visible mysterious signs in Jesus and His redemptive might, a refreshing touching of the hem of His sacred wounds. That is the deepest purpose of the Liturgy, namely, to make the redeeming grace of Christ present, visible and fruitful as a sacred and potent reality that fills the whole life of the Christian. In the Sacrament of Baptism--so the believer holds--the sacrificial blood of Christ flows into the soul, purifies it from all the infirmity of original sin and permeates it with its own sacred strength, in order that a new man may be born thereof, the re-

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31 *Baltimore Catechism*, 56.
born man, the man who is an adopted son of God. In the sacrament of Confirmation Jesus sends His "Comforter," the Spirit of constancy and divine faith, to the awakening religious consciousness, in order to form the child of God into a soldier of God. In the sacrament of Penance Jesus as a merciful Saviour consoles the afflicted soul with the word of peace: Go thy way, thy sins are forgiven thee. In the sacrament of the Last Anointing the compassionate Samaritan approaches the sick-bed and pours new courage and resignation into the sore heart. In the sacrament of Marriage He engrafts the love of man and wife on His own profound love for His people, for the community, for the Church, on His own faithfulness unto death. And in the priestly consecration by the imposition of hands, He transmits His messianic might, the power of His mission, to the disciples whom He calls, in order that He may by their means pursue without interruption His work of raising the new man, the children of God, out of the kingdom of death.32

The sacraments, then, are a visible guarantee, backed by the word of Christ and the employment of them by the Apostles, that Jesus, the Son of God, is working now in the midst of us "under veils." But the sacraments mentioned above are not the holiest, now that we know of the most heavily veiled of all:

We eat His flesh and drink His blood. So greatly does Jesus love His community, that He permeates it, not merely with His blessings and His might, but with His real union of flesh and blood with it, and binds it to His being even as the

branch is bound to the vine. We are not left orphans in this world. Under the forms of bread and wine the Master lives amid His disciples, the Bridegroom with His bride, the Lord in the midst of His community, until the day when He shall return in visible majesty on the clouds of heaven. The sacrament of the Altar is the strongest, profoundest, most intimate memorial of the Lord, until He comes again.33

The true and faithful Catholic does not merely hope that Christ will come to him in the sacraments. He knows that He does. He knows that Christ is really there, as really and truly as He once was in the streets of Jerusalem or on the Sea of Galilee. The true Catholic sees:

...Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames;34

Karl Adam, having finished with the part the sacraments play in the Catholic's life, continues with the sacramentals:

The sacramentals...are supplications for blessings and grace made by the faithful and by the whole Church, and objectively manifested in visible signs. When the Catholic uses Holy Water, or makes the sign of the Cross on the forehead of one he loves, or fixes on his wall blessed palms and blessed flowers, his action signifies a devout communion with the intercessory prayer of the whole Church, that God may help him in all his needs. Each and every element of his mundane life,

33 Ibid., 21.
from marriage ring and bridal bed down to the blessed salt which he gives to a sick beast, is drawn by the blessings of the Church into a supernatural relation with God. By this means the whole activity of the Catholic in all its aspects is directed towards heaven--by visible things to things invisible. It is true that abuses are possible and that the sacramentals may be degraded into magical charms. But wherever there are men there will be abuses, nor should we judge a good thing by its abuses, but contrariwise. 35

Let us return now and establish anew our connection between the sacraments and Catholic culture. A knowledge of the sacraments, of their dignity, of their efficacy; a knowledge of the Mass and its untold values; a knowledge of the sacramentals and how they contribute to one's spiritual well-being—all these help to form the system of doctrine which makes up one's Catholic cultus. The actual putting into practice, the actual partaking of the sacraments, the going to Mass, the using of sacramentals—these make one's Catholic cult. It is when one's daily acts are permeated by this knowledge and action of what the sacraments are and can do for one, that one claims he is participating in Catholic culture. Hence, it covers not only one's strictly religious worship of God through the sacraments, the Mass, one's prayers, the sacramentals, but also the resultant attitude one takes toward each and every department of his everyday life, be

35 Adam, Spirit of Catholicism, 138.
it work, play, or prayer. The grace of the sacraments, like a
leaven permeating the whole, gives a man Catholic culture in his
life.

This "permeation" of Catholic culture in a man's life takes
place on three different levels, or in three different orders,
to wit: in his religious, social, and aesthetic life. Our next
step, therefore, is to consider these various orders as colored
with Catholic culture.

Catholic culture means, in the religious order, that what-
ever a man does, he strives to tend more and more toward close
conformity with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church; and
that his every act will be measured by a scale that sets prime
values on God, not on self. All a man's human acts which are in
accord with this ordering of values are morally good; all those
in discord are morally bad. This is why there is a Catholic way
of doing everything. A group of men, for example, will join
together in a business office for six days, all engrossed in the
functions of secular life. All through the week these men have
precisely the same physical work. But what a difference that
work has in each one's scale of values! The Catholic is reminded,
and feels he ought, and more and more tends, to perform his
duties, perhaps those of a broker, with the knowledge that he is
working before the eyes of God. He knows that God put him be-
hind this desk; and chances are that the knowledge will lead
him to more and more honest attention to business and pleasure as a way, under God, to sanctify his life. His going to Church and Mass on Sunday, and perhaps even on week-days, is but an external manifestation of the driving force within him that sanctifies and sublimates - makes Catholic - the everyday job in his office. The fingerling of his rosary in his pocket going to and from work may come to be another expression of this inner-wellspring. Thus, continued cultus (knowledge) tends to a more and more intelligent cult (action), and both to his being a more authentic part of a true Catholic culture. He becomes a leader in things both Catholic and cultural.

The neo-pagan, on the other hand, who works in the same office with the Catholic, what inner force is prodding him? Arguing back from his expression of what he lives for we find him working for at least three things: it may be the pleasure money will bring him, it may be the power money will bring him, or, at best, it may be the sense of satisfaction he receives from doing his work for the sake of his work. At all events, his every act is an expression of an amoral scale of values. But both Catholic and pagan have given unconscious expression to their particular scale. They are manifesting their realization of things interior by their open worship of things exterior.

Our Catholic would even sin in a Catholic sense; for if he sins he calls it sin. For example, if he removes a child pre-
maturely from the womb of its mother, he calls it murder; he refuses to gloss over his act with the respectable phraseology of "therapeutic abortion." But how, then, do we explain Catholic lives which are most beautiful in theory, but which become quite ordinary, even at times grossly sinful, in practice? How can we explain the considerable lag of actual Catholicism behind its ideal? Briefly, ideal Catholicity has never been realized and probably never will be; it will always be a thing in the process of slow, laborious growth. Why?

Karl Adam has striven to answer this perplexing question in his Spirit of Catholicism. What is the cause of the great tragedy of this continual conflict between the ideal and the real Catholicism, the theory and the fact? He adduces four reasons, which we shall summarize here. The first and most obvious cause, he says, lies in man's complete inability to conceive and represent God as He is in His divine nature. We grasp the actuality of the absolute and infinite and incomprehensible, the essence and existence of God, only by analogous conceptions. We can speak of God only by comparisons. Consequently, the sublime revelations which God has deigned to give us about Himself never sufficiently penetrate our consciousness, their force and vigor are weakened as they filter through our human conceptions and notions. The idea of God never has a character of sunlight, but always of semi-darkness. Therefore, the limitations of men -
their temperament, mentality, and character - are bound to color the manner in which they dispense the truth and grace of God. "Men...are unable in their small mirrors to receive all the rays of light which went from His divine Person and to transmute them without loss into living forces." 36

The second reason for this conflict is because the Church, like her divine Master, must always be where the sinner is. Her vocation is to save men. Consequently, nowhere else does evil become so visible because nowhere else is evil so keenly fought. Like the Mother she is, the Church takes in both sick and well, good and bad; and if the sick remain sick and the bad remain bad, it will not be because of her ministrations, but despite her every effort to heal and make whole all her children. 37

A third reason for the conflict lies in the nature of the Church. It is her duty to tell men on the strength of her authority alone what they can do and cannot do in the spheres of faith and morals. Human liberty rebels against this teaching authority of the Church. In his saner moments a man will whole-heartedly agree to this authority, but in a moment of frenzy he will act as though he never heard of it.

The fourth reason is that the claims of the individual personality react violently against the claims of the community.

36 Ibid., 242-250 passim.
37 Ibid., 250-254 passim.
The Church is a community and implies a common life. And every individual, especially those whom God made vigorous and richly talented, finds it supremely difficult to knuckle under and be absorbed by the organism of the community. Even when the spirit of Pentecost inflames certain members, the Church's rigid laws may hamper him. Cooperation is necessary, and if it is not forthcoming, conflict is the result. 38

Catholic culture, then, in a man's religious life, plays a very important part, even though he be saint or sinner.

Our notion of Catholic culture means, in the social order, that a man who is a living member of the Church partakes vitally in the Mystical Body of Christ - he is not a dead member. He gives expression to this recognition of his dignity by centering his interests and uniting with all other Catholics in the Sacrifice of the Mass, by striving to help, not to hinder, his neighbor in the attaining of his goal: the Kingdom of Heaven. One who is living according to the scale of Catholic culture realizes in their fulness these words of St. Paul:

Now you are the body of Christ and members of a member... For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another. 39

38 Ibid., 255-263 passim.
39 St. Paul, I Cor., XII, 27, 12 ff.
This concept of the Church's unity, its organic nature, is another definite mark of Catholicity. Again we turn to Karl Adam for corroboration:

Because the Man Jesus, the personified "We" of the redeemed, embraces in his Person the whole multitude of those needing redemption, Christianity is essentially a union of the members with their Head, a Holy Community, a Holy Body. There is no such thing as an isolated and solitary Christ. There is no such thing as an isolated and solitary Christian. This interior and invisible union of the members with the Head necessarily presses for an exterior unity equally close-knit. Hence, Christianity in the world of time and space has existed always as an exterior unity, as a visible community, as a Church. Christianity has always demanded that its interior unity should be embodied and exhibited in an exterior unity. Christianity has ever been an ecclesiastical Christianity; it has never been anything else. 40

This notion of unity is born out historically in the many vicissitudes of the Church's reign on earth. From among the many examples we have at hand, we may take the Middle Ages, wherein unity, far and above all other notes, was the keynote of civilization and culture. In those wholesome days there was no departmentalization of life. A solid oneness of principle bound together every one of man's actions and made them a united whole. True, a many-sided whole, but never a divided whole. There was no

40 Adam, The Son of God, 14.
Catholic "side" to life. A side implies a part. A side is only part of a whole thing. And no Medieval Catholic was only "part" Catholic. He was a whole Catholic whether he was a serf, baron, or knight. He was a whole Catholic whether he tilled the soil, hunted, or loved his lady fair. When we call a man of the Middle Ages a Catholic, we have said everything about everything—because Catholicism is more than a creed, it is a culture, an attitude, a sense, a whole way of life.41 As Belloc says: "Religion is the principle of a society, and they [the Medieval nations and men] had all one religion."42

Almost all historical writers, even hostile ones, never seem to tire of telling us that unity and totality of life were the characteristic marks of Medieval thought. De Wulf, for example, says:

There was one system of education for princes, lords, and clerks; one sacred and learned language, the Latin; one code of morals, one ritual, one hierarchy, the Church; one faith and one common interest against heathendom and Islam, one community on earth and in heaven, one system of feudal habits...43

That the Catholic Church was mainly responsible, solely respon-

43 Maurice De Wulf, Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages, Princeton University Press, 1922, 131.
sible, for this phenomenon there can be little doubt. From the
fourth to the thirteenth century the Church was in the vanguard
of advancing civilization. The patched-up political unity of
Roman days fell to pieces, and a well-knit religious unity sprang
up into its place. All society, irrespective of knowledge, arts,
science, power, language, origin fell beneath the unifying influence of the Church. And from the chaos of the crash of the Rom-
an Empire, from the disorder caused by the ravagings of the bar-
barians, from the ruins of a fallen materialistic philosophy came
the idea of a society bound together by a spiritual, religious
bond: a social sense growing out of an unconscious living of the
Mystical Body of Christ:

It is characteristic of Medieval religion
that its spiritual ideals found expression
in a definite sociological organism. The
spiritual life was not a vague aspiration,
or an abstract idea, it was a life in the
full sense of the word, an organized pat-
tern of behavior which was embodied in
distinct institutional forms and which
possessed an autonomous economic exis-
tence, which rendered it at least poten-
tially independent of its social environ-
ment.44

Perhaps we have dwelt unduly long in giving our examples
of the sociological unity of the Middle Ages, but it seemed
necessary in order to bring out as clearly as possible this sup-
reme note of the power of unification in Catholic culture.

44 Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Religion*, Sheed & Ward, New York,
1934, 20.
However, we are now ready to take up the third order or level of life in which Catholic culture expresses itself, and that is the intellectual or aesthetic. Catholic culture in this order means the fashioning of the finest in the sciences and arts: the building and ornamenting of Cathedrals in architecture, sculpture, and painting; the accurate enactment of the beauties of the Liturgy through music and literature. Beginning with the literature of the four Evangelists and St. Paul, the Catholic Church has always not only upheld the finest in culture, but has contributed much of the very finest. For example, whence did Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque architecture, those different expressions of succeeding ages, come, other than from a succession of Catholic Cathedrals? e.g., Chartres, Notre Dame, Cologne, Lincoln, Gloucester. Similarly, too, innumerable paintings and sculpturings were the products of essentially devout hands and essentially Catholic minds. In Philosophy there were St. Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and all the greater Schoolmen. In literature there were Dante, Cervantes, Chaucer, Richard Rolle, Tasso, etc.; in painting, Michelangelo, Raphael, Fra Angelico, Da Vinci, El Greco, Giotto, and countless others.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, a vast portion of what makes up "modern culture" stems from, borrows from, or is inspired by fresh interests or understandings of the Catholic culture of bygone centuries.

There is another feature in our concept of culture which is worth noting. Catholic culture is not only supernatural, it is also supernatational. There is in it something that will endure in all civilizations of all times. For, as Maritain says: "Civilizations and cultures endure in virtue of the good they contain, and they are pregnant with human and divine truth." These truths the Catholic Church can assimilate and supernaturalize because of her innate divine origin and mission. "Go forth and teach ye all nations," Christ commanded His Apostles. Consequently, in Europe, Catholic culture may carry a definite European stamp, as well as its own universal imprint, feudalistic in one age, smacking of renaissance and revolution in another; in England, Catholic culture may have an English imprint, along with its universal elements. And even in China or India, small though the Catholic population may be, the Catholic culture which will color their lives will in turn be imbued with Chinese or Indian traits and customs, and vice versa. The cultus underlying Catholic culture has remained the same for centuries; for the cultus lends what we know as the universal note. But the cult of various times, climes, and nationalities brings to this universal quality the many and varied accidental and specific manifestations of the cultus. Catholic culture is universal; its expression is accidental.

46 Maritain, 34.
47 St. Matthew, XXVIII, 19.
To sum up, then, we can say that culture, in its primitive sense, coming from the Latin word *colere* means a harrowing and tilling to secure from the soil a proper growth. Human culture is the 'tilling' transferred to the cultivation of the human being whereby he strives to know and to do characteristically human things, the finer things of life (at least those with which he comes into contact). But culture not only depends on *cultus* for its root meaning, but also on *cult*. We can view the process as being cultus, cult, culture. Cultus, an organized system of doctrine, gives rise to and animates the cult, an organized system of worship. Both give rise to culture: cultus by furnishing culture with themes and mysteries for expression and intellection; cult by furnishing the driving power, the motivation which leads the individual to turn naturally to these themes, as to things loved, in his expression. Culture, then, is a whole way of life that is the outgrowth of what we know, believe, and do. Thus, Catholic culture depends on the sacraments, the Mass, the sacramentals; and in so far as one's daily acts are permeated by the religious energy coming from these elements of "sacramentalism," to that extent does he participate vitally in Catholic culture.

We are now in a position to examine the daily life of the characters of the *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and to ask ourselves whether we find in their lives this sacramentally whole way of life, this Catholicity, this attitude which we call Catholic culture. This
attitude will naturally be shown in what the characters of the Morte say and do as they charge about on their steeds, as they rescue distressed damsels, as they joust with rebel knights, as they go off in quest of the Holy Grail. If these everyday actions are flavored with Catholic, sacramental practices and prayers, we can say that the characters, in the main, are striving to lead a life in conformity with Catholic culture. For it is the way a knight colors, permeates his every act with Catholicity that establishes the norm of his culture. Let us now look at some of these Catholic sacramental acts which intermingle with the everyday, vigorous life of the warriors.
CHAPTER III

THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE IN LE MORTE D'ARTHUR: PART I

The first sacrament to be received by any member of the Catholic Church is Baptism. Without this initial cleansing of original sin, the person is unable to receive any other sacrament, because he is not yet a member of the Church. This is because he is not yet fully united to Christ as a member to the head. Without becoming thus "Christ-ianed" the unbaptized person is unable to receive the rich diffusion of divine grace and virtues, which qualify him for the performances of all the offices of Christian piety. Further, the sacrament of Baptism is ordinarily necessary for salvation; it opens the portals of heaven which sin closed against man's admission. For adults, the reception of the sacrament means not only the remission of original sin, but also the remission of personal guilt of sin, however enormous. It wipes away the effects of concupiscence, although concupiscence, the fuel of sin, remains. Thus the soul replenished with divine grace, by which, rendered just and a child of God, a person is

made co-heir with Christ of eternal life.\(^2\)

The characters of the *Morte* realize the importance, dignity and efficacy of this sacrament. Even Sir Palomides, the Paynim or Moor, feels very much out of place because he is not a Christian. He complains, "I never was christened, but my two brethren are truly christened."\(^3\) And Sir Tristram, having gravely wounded Palomides in a "grudge" fight, suddenly realizing what tremendous blessings the Moor would lose if he died unbaptized, cries out, "He is not christened, and I would be loath that he should die a Saracen."\(^4\) On another occasion when Palomides had fought and conquered a "felonious knight," this little scene, which gives us a glimpse of the medieval mind concerning Baptism, occurred:

> Then Palomides arose lightly, and smote him upon the helm that he fell down right to the earth. And therewith he raced off his helm and said: Corsabrin, yield thee or else thou shalt die of my hands. Fie on thee, said Corsabrin, do thy worst. Then he smote off his head... So was the corpse had away and buried in a wood, because he was a Paynim. Then they blew unto lodging, and Palomides was unarmed. Then he went unto Queen Guenever, to the haut prince, and to Sir Launcelot. Sir, said the haut prince...we will require you take the baptism upon you, and I promise you all knights will set the more by you and say more worship by you. Sir, said Palomides, I will that ye all know that into this land I came to be christened, and in my heart I am christened, and christened I will be. But I have made such an avow

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2 *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 128 ff.
4 Ibid., I, 283.
that I may not be christened till I have done seven true battles for Jesu's sake, and then will I be christened; and I trust God will take mine intent, for I mean truly.  

After his seven battles "for Jesu's sake" Sir Palomides was duly baptized. But whether or not the Baptism strengthened his soul and made him a better man, we shall never know, because immediately after describing the Moor's Baptism, Malory launches into the tale of the Holy Grail:

Sir Palomides said...wherefore I require you, my lord, forgive me all that I have offended unto you; and this same day have me to the next church...and after see you now that I be truly baptized. And then will we all ride together unto the court of Arthur, that we be there at the high feast. Now take your horse, said Sir Tristram, and as ye say so it shall be, and all thine evil will God forgive it you, and I do. And here within this mile is the suffragan of Carlisle that shall give you the sacrament of baptism. Then they took their horses and Sir Galleron rode with them...And when they came to the suffragan Sir Tristram told him their desire. Then the suffragan let fill a great vessel with water, and when he had hallowed it then he...baptized Sir Palomides, and Sir Tristram and Sir Galleron were his godfathers. And then soon after they departed, riding toward Camelot... And so the king and all the court were glad that Sir Palomides was christened.  

Sir Gawaine, too, can think of no higher reward than Baptism

5 Ibid., II, 48.  
6 Ibid., II, 162-3.
for one of his Saracen prisoners who has done him a great favor:

Had not he been...a good man of arms, we should never have returned; wherefore I pray you that he may be baptized; for there liveth not a nobler man nor better knight of his hands.7

King Hurlame, a Saracen, is also christened and henceforth men call him "one of the wyttyest men of the world;"8 the "wytyest" being ascribed him for his wisdom in becoming a Christian. Reference is also made to the baptism of a certain King Evelake by no other hand than that of the son of Joseph of Aramathea; it is a noble story:

...Joseph of Aramathe, the gentle knight, the which took down our Lord off the holy Cross, at that time departed from Jerusalem...and came to a city that hight Sarra. And at the same hour that Joseph came to Sarra there was a king that hight Evelake, that had great war against the Saracens, and in especial against one Saracen, the which was King Evelake's cousin, a rich king and a mighty, which marched nigh this land, and his name was called Tollemle la Feintes. So on a day these two met to do battle. Then Joseph, the son of Joseph of Aramathe, went to King Evelake and told him he should be discomfit and slain, but if he left his belief of the old law and believed upon the new law. And then there he shewed him the right belief of the Holy Trinity, to the which he agreed unto with all his heart; and there this shield was made for King Evelake, in the name of Him that died upon the Cross. And then through his good belief he had the better of King Tollemle. For when Evelake was in the battle there was a cloth set afore the shield,

7 Ibid., I, 149.
8 Ibid., II, 240.
and when he was in greatest peril he let put away the cloth, and then his enemies saw a figure of a man on the Cross, where-through they all were discomfit. And so it befell that a man of King Evelake's was smitten his hand off, and bare that hand in his other hand; and Joseph called that man unto him and bade him go with good devotion to touch the Cross. And as soon as that man had touched the Cross with his hand it was as whole as ever it was tofore. Then soon after there fell a great marvel, that the Cross of the shield at one time vanished away that no man wist where it became. And then King Evelake was baptized, and for the most part all the people of that city...And after that all the people were turned to the Christian faith.3

When it comes to the Baptism of their own children, the characters seize upon the first opportunity to have the saving waters poured over the child's head, a practice long urged by the Church.10

For example, Merlin sees to the christening of Arthur before he is smuggled away to be raised in Sir Ector's court: "So the child was delivered unto Merlin...and he made an holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur."11 Tristram the "sorrowful born child" is christened immediately after his mother's death and burial:

But the sorrow that the king made for his queen that might no tongue tell. So then the king let inter her richly, and after he let christen his child as his wife had commanded afore her death. And, then he

9 Ibid., II, 177.
10 Catechism of the Council of Trent, 124.
11 Malory, I, 9.
let call him Tristram, the sorrowful
born child.  

And when Sir Galahad is begotten of Elaine by Launcelot, he is promptly baptized:

And as fast as her time came she was delivered of a fair child, and they christened him Galahad; and wit ye well that child was well kept and nourished, and he was named Galahad by cause Sir Launcelot was so named at the fountain stone...then this lady was delivered and churched.

Some of the details surrounding the ceremony of Baptism slip into the text. A priest ordinarily administers the sacrament, but kings also perform the rites. The custom is to administer the sacrament in church, but the "holy man" baptizes Arthur probably does so in his hermit's hut. We know that immersion was the custom of the day, but the only reference to this mode of baptism is an indirect one, when it is said, "...the suffragan let fill a great vessel with water."  

One of the sacraments, Confirmation, does not appear in the romance. This is natural because in the Middle Ages Confirmation was administered to children before their seventh year, sometimes immediately after birth at their Baptism. Adult converts,

12 Ibid., I, 240.
13 Ibid., II, 128.
14 Ibid., I, 9.
15 Ibid., II, 163.
16 Ibid., II, 163.
such as Moors renouncing paganism and embracing Catholicism, were also confirmed at their Baptism. Consequently, it was no separate ceremony, and not being a special occasion in the lives of the characters, evokes no mention.

Just as we saw that Baptism is necessary for those who wished to be saved, so Penance is necessary for those who fall into mortal sin in the years after Baptism. Through the sacrament of Penance a man disarms the divine vengeance; he removes the depravity of sin from his soul; he restores himself to the friendship of God. Among such hardy, robust characters as those in the Morte it is not strange to see falls into serious sin. But their contrition is swift and keen. A knight feels sorry for having offended God and detests his sin for this reason. Sir Calgrevance, for instance, after he has sinned, gives voice to an act of contrition before he is slain:

Fair sweet Jesu, that I have misdone, have mercy on my soul, for such sorrow that my heart suffereth for goodness, and for alms deed that I would have done here, be to me alygement of penance unto my soul's health. 17

Sir Percivale, too, is overcome with grief at having almost succumbed to a sin of lust:

Then Sir Percivale made great sorrow, and drew his sword unto him, saying: Sithen my flesh will be my master, I shall punish it;

17 Ibid., II, 234.
and therewith he rove himself through the thigh that the blood start about him, and said: O good Lord, take this in recompensation of that I have done against thee, my Lord.18

However, immediately after they had sinned is not the only time the characters think of confession and penance. This sacrament is deemed most valuable when a knight desires to become as pure as possible in order better to go forth on a mission, such as the quest of the Holy Grail:

For I let you wit, said King Pelles, here [i.e., at Pelles' castle where the Sangreal has just appeared] shall no knight win no worship but if he be of worship himself and of good living, and that loveth God and dreadeth God, and else he getteth no worship here, be he ever so hardy. That is wonderful thing, Sir Bors said... Then I counsel you, said the king, to be confessed olene. As for that, said Sir Bors, I will be shriven with a good will. So Sir Bors was confessed, and for all women Sir Bors was a virgin...19

Later on during the quest Sir Bors takes advantage of another occasion to go to confession:

When Sir Bors was departed from Camelot he met with a religious man riding on an ass, and Sir Bors saluted him. Anon the good man knew him that he was one of the knights errant that was in the quest of the Sangreal... Certes, said the good man... wit you well there shall none attain it but by cleanness, that is pure confession. So they rode together till that they came to

18 Ibid., II, 204.
19 Ibid., II, 130.
an hermitage. And there he prayed Bors to dwell all that night with him. And so he alit and put away his armour, and he prayed him that he might be confessed; and so they went into chapel, and there he was clean confessed, and they ate bread and drank water together.

Other characters desire the sacrament of Penance whenever their consciences are unduly burdened, or if they think they would be able to pray better. At the command of the Archbishop, for instance, all the "lords and gentlemen of arms" come to London to select a King. But before these ruling knights and barons would set about such a weighty task they "...made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be more acceptable unto God." It is on this occasion that Arthur draws the sword from the rock and is acclaimed King.

After Sir Tristram severely trounces Sir Palomides in a joust, the Moor thinks he can achieve some of the stalwart worthiness of his enemy if he were a Christian and a better man. He says to Tristram:

Wherefore I require you, my Lord, forgive me all that I have offended you; and this same day have me to the next church, and first let me be clean confessed...

Sir Melias is chided by an old monk in the presence of Galahad for taking upon himself the high order of knighthood "without

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20 Ibid., II, 220.
21 Ibid., I, 10.
22 Ibid., II, 162.
...the devil saw your pride and presumption for to take you in quest of the Holy Grail, that made you to be overthrown, for it may not be achieved but by virtuous living. 23

Sir Gawaine and Sir Ector having just witnessed the death of Sir Uwaine feel the weight of their sins and are eager to set accounts straight with their God:

And then Uwaine himself and Sir Gawaine drew out the truncheon of the spear, and anon departed the soul from the body. Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Ector buried him as men ought to bury a king's son, and made write upon his name, and by whom he was slain. Then departed Gawaine and Ector as heavy as they might for their misadventure, and so rode till that they came to the rough mountain, and there they tied their horses and went on foot to the hermitage. And when they were come up they saw a poor house, and beside the chapel a little courtelage, where Nacien the hermit gathered worts, as he which had tasted none other meat of a great while. And when he saw the errant knights he came toward them and saluted them, and they him again. Fair lords, said he, what adventure brought you hither? Sir, said Gawaine, to speak with you for to be confessed. Sir, said the hermit, I am ready. Then they they told him so much that he wist well what they were. And then he thought to counsel them if he might. 24

When the holy hermit had spoken with the two knights for some time, listened to their description of a vision they had recently

23 Ibid., II, 181-2.
24 Ibid., II, 217.
seen, and explained the vision, he said to them quite frankly:

But ye two knights, said the hermit, ye go to seek that ye shall never find; that is the Sangreal; for it is the secret thing of our Lord Jesu Christ...And when he went and said: Knights of poor faith and of wicked belief, these three things failed in you, abstinence, charity, and truth; therefore ye may not attain that high adventure of the Sangreal.25

On the same night in which Queen Guinever and Sir Launcelot realize their sin and renounce their love for one another, Launcelot rides forth until he comes to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The knight throws his arms apart, and says:"Alas, who may trust this world. And then he kneeled down on his knees, and prayed the Bishop to shrive and assoil him."26

However remiss a knight may have been during his life, he is always careful when in danger of death to put things straight with God. He realizes that an entrance into the presence of his just Judge with sin on his soul would mean only one thing: eternal pain and damnation. Consequently, he makes every effort possible to avail himself of this last privilege. Sir Melias, for example, has reason to make an earnest plea for confession:

And then they let their horses run as fast as they might, so that the other knight smote Sir Melias through the hauberk and through the left side, that he fell to the

26 Ibid., II, 396.
earth nigh dead... and Sir Melias lay still and had no power to stir. In the meanwhile be fortune there came Sir Galahad and found him in peril of death. And then he said: Ah, Melias, who hath wounded you? and therefore it had been better to have ridden the other way. And when Sir Melias heard him speak: Sir, he said, for God's love let me not die in this forest, but bear me unto the abbey here beside, that I may be confessed and have my rights. It shall be done, said Galahad...27

For good reason had he cried out thus for Confession because his confessor was to tell him:

How durst ye take upon you so rich a thing as the high order of Knighthood without alone confession, and that was the cause ye were bitterly wounded.28

A deep knowledge of the effects of the sacrament of Penance, a knowledge that comes spontaneously to mind in time of danger, is evidenced by the swooning from grief of the wounded Sir Bors when Lionel his brother advances to kill him. Bors is "sore distressed" because he will be killed without the benefits of confession:

Sir Bors... kneeled he down afore Lionel's horse's feet, and said: Fair sweet brother, have mercy upon me and slay me not, and have in remembrance the great love which ought to be between us twain. What Sir Bors said to Lionel he recked not, for the fiend had brought him in such a will that he should slay him. Then when Lion-

27 Ibid., II, 180.
28 Ibid., II, 181.
saw he would not other, and that he would not have risen to give him battle, he rushed over him so that he smote Bors with his horse, feet upward to the earth, and hurst him so sore of distress, the which he felt in himself to have died without confession. So when Lionel saw this, he alit off his horse to have smitten off his head...Then came the hermit running unto him, which was a good man and of great age, and well had he heard all the words that were between them, and so fell down upon Sir Bors.29

Sir Uwaine is carried by Sir Gawaine to a monastery after being pierced by that worthy knight's truncheon. In the monastery he is shriven and receives his Creator.30 Lord Earl Hernox trying to save his beloved daughter fought desperately against his incestuous sons who were attacking her. He is grievously wounded by them, but at the end he is "confessed and houseld":

...and I shall tell you how that I wot of this castle. Here was Lord Earl Hernox not but one year, and he had three sons, good knights of arms, and a daughter, the fairest gentlewoman that men knew. So those three knights loved their sister so sore that they brent in love, and so they lay by her, maugre her head. And for she cried to her father they slew her, and took their father and put him in prison, and wounded him nigh to death, but a cousin of hers rescued him. And then did they great untruth: they slew clerks and priests, and made beat down chapels, that Our Lord's service might not be served nor said. And this same day her father

29 Ibid., II, 232.
30 Ibid., II, 216.
sent to me for to be confessed and houseld. 31

Not only are the knights conscious of their sins but also the fair damsels, especially at the hour of death. A maiden of the queen's court who, though of high blood, had never spoken a word, suddenly appears in court one day and leads Sir Percivale to the right side of the Siege Perilous. Then she cries in a loud voice that this seat belongs to him and to no other. Then "...right so she departed and asked for a priest. And as she was confessed and houseld then she died."32 Sir Percivale, too, discovers from his aunt, a recluse, that his mother has had a sorrowful but religious death. She tells him: "Your mother is dead, for after your departing from her she took such a sorrow that anon, after she was confessed, she died."33

One of the saddest deaths in all of Le Morte D'Arthur is that of Elaine, the fair maid of Astolat. She has loved only Launcelot, is yet a "clene maiden," but is wasting away from sorrow. Neither food nor drink has passed her lips for ten days. Finally, "...she must needs pass out of this world; then she shrived her clene, and received her Creator."34 She bemoans the fact that she is an "earthly maiden" and cannot put Launcelot out of her thoughts,

31 Ibid., II, 248.
32 Ibid., II, 13.
33 Ibid., II, 193.
34 Ibid., II, 303.
even now at the hour of death:

...that I shall die for the love of so noble a knight, I beseech the High Father of Heaven to have mercy upon my soul, and upon mine innumerable pains that I have suffered may be allegiance of part of my sins. For, sweet Lord Jesu, said the fair maiden, I take Thee to record that on Thee I was never great ofenser against Thy laws; but that I loved this noble knight, Sir Launcelot, out of measure, and of myself, good Lord, I might not withstand the fervent love wherefore I have my death.35

When Queen Guinever's unfaithfulness has at last been made known to King Arthur, he promptly orders her to pass a test by fire, knowing full well she will be burnt to a crisp. It is at the moment of her last confession, just after she has been "so shriven", that Launcelot's spy gives the word, and the Knight and his fellows descend upon the stake, rescue the Queen, and cause a fierce enmity to come between the King and himself.36

That they must do corporal penance for their sins, pay back to God what they have "stolen" from Him, is recognized by everyone. Sir Launcelot, for example, stricken unconscious, having "lost the power of his body, and his hearing, and his seeing," lies well-nigh dead in a chamber for twenty-four days:

In such manner they kept Launcelot four

35 Ibid., II, 304.
36 Ibid., II, 352.
and twenty days and all so many nights, that ever he lay still as a dead man; and at the twenty-fifth day befell him after midday that he opened his eyes. And when he saw folk he made great sorrow, and said: Why have ye awaked me, for I was more at ease than I am now. O Jesu Christ, who might be so blessed that might see openly thy great marvels of secretness there where no sinner may be! What have ye seen? said they about him. I have seen, said he, so great marvels that no tongue may tell, and more than any heart can think, and had not my son been afore me I had seen much more. Then they told him how he had lain there four and twenty days and nights. Then him thought it was punishment for the four and twenty years that he had been a sinner, wherefore Our Lord put him in penance for four and twenty days and nights...Then they asked how it stood with him. Forsooth, said he, I am whole of body, thanked be Our Lord; therefore, sirs, for God's love tell me where I am. Then said they all that he was in the castle of Garbonek. Therewith came a gentlewoman and brought him a shirt of linen cloth, but he changed not there, but took the hair cloth to him again.37

This reference to the hair-cloth is interesting, for sufferings of the body were not only imposed by God; confessors often prescribed them for their penitents. Sir Launcelot had been ordered to wear this hairshirt long before:

And then Sir Launcelot dwelled with that good man that night. Sir, said the good man, be ye not Sir Launcelot du Lake? Yea, sir, said he. What seek ye in this country? Sir, said Sir Launcelot, I go

37 Ibid., II, 258-9.
to seek the adventures of the Sangreal. Well, said he, seek it ye may well, but though it were here ye shall have no power to see it no more than a blind man should see a bright sword, and that is long on your sin, and else ye were more abler than any man living. And then Sir Launcelot began to weep. Than said the good man: Were ye confessed sith ye entered into the quest of the Sangreal? Yea, sir, said Sir Launcelot. Then upon the morn when the good man had sung his Mass, then they buried the dead man. Then Sir Launcelot said: Father, what shall I do? Now, said the good man, I require you take this hair that was this holy man's and put it next thy skin, and it shall prevail thee greatly. Sir, and I will do it, said Sir Launcelot. Also I charge thee that ye eat no flesh as long as ye be in the quest of the Sangreal, nor shall drink no wine, and that ye hear mass daily an ye may do it. So he took the hair and put it upon him, and so departed at even-song time...And then Sir Launcelot went to supper, and so laid him to rest, and the hair pricked so Sir Launcelot's skin which grieved him full sore, but he took it meekly, and suffered the pain. And so on the morn he heard his mass and took his arms, and so took his leave. 38

One way of doing penance for sin was to live the hardy life of a knight. The buffets, pains, and sufferings were hard ones. Sir Gawaine, for instance, does not hesitate to tell a confessor that he will take no penance, although he realizes he has some coming to him:

Now, Sir Gawaine, said the good man, thou

must do penance for thy sin. Sir, what penance shall I do? Such as I will give you, said the good man. Nay, said Sir Gawaine, I may do no penance; for we knights adventurous oft suffer great woe and pain. Well, said the good man, and then he held his peace. And on the morn Sir Gawaine departed from the hermit, and betaught him unto God.39

Sir Launcelot gives the most complete confession scene in the book. He has been smitten down by his son Sir Galahad in a fight and his charger has run away. He comes to a hermitage heavy with despair, "a wretch of the world." He goes to confession:

For this fourteen year I never discovered one thing that I have used, and that may I now wyte my shame and misadventure. And then he told there that good man all his life. And how he had loved a queen unmeasurably and out of measure long; and all my great deeds of arms that I have done, I did for the most part for the queen's sake, and for her sake would I do battle were it right or wrong; and never did I battle all only for God's sake, but to win worship and to cause me to be the better beloved, and little or nought I thanked God of it...40

The good hermit absolved him and bade him pursue his Knighthood after prescribing his penance.

Thus we see that the characters were anxious to have poured

39 Ibid., II, 186.
40 Ibid., II, 190.
down on their penitent heads the saving grace won for them by Christ in His Passion. They know that the priest who shrived them did not hear their confessions in his own right but as the representative of God; and, provided they were sorry, whatever the priest bound or loosed upon earth in the name of Jesus Christ was bound or loosed in Heaven also. This knowledge gave them a deep, serious love of the sacrament, a love for its cleansing and bracing powers. Confession gave them new courage and new confidence to start afresh in this life, or to enter the next life as an intimate friend of God.

Baptism and Penance, then, are the sacraments that purge the soul of its dross, and leave it strong for the fight of life. Unfortunately, the one sacrament that could have made the souls of the knights even stronger is seldom frequented by them: the Holy Eucharist. Not that they scorn this sacrament, or think preparation for it bothersome. On the contrary it is their very reverence for this august sacrament that deters them from receiving their Blessed Lord more frequently. Such was the custom of the day. It was not until 1905 that Pope Pius X decreed and urged frequent even daily communion for the whole Catholic Church. Communion at least once a year, of course, was then, as now, mandatory. But it does not follow that once a year was all. However, in the Morte the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is never mentioned except as one of the last sacraments. Such is even the
case of Sir Galahad who, though perfectly sound in mind and body, 
dies after receiving the contents of the Sangreal:

Galahad...arose up early and his fellows, 
and came to the palace, and saw tofore 
them the holy vessel, and a man kneeling 
on his knees in likeness of a bishop, 
that had about him a great fellowship of 
angels as it had been Jesu Christ himself; 
and then he arose and began a mass of Our 
Lady. And when he came to the Sacrament 
of the mass, and had done, anon he called 
Galahad, and said to him: Come forth the 
servant of Jesu Christ, and thou shalt see 
that thou wast much desired to see...And 
therewith the good man took Our Lord's 
body twixt his hands, and proffered it 
to Galahad, and he received it right 
gladly and meekly...And therewith he 
kneed down tofore the table and made his 
prayers, and then suddenly his soul de- 
parted to Jesu Christ, and a great multi-
tude of angels bare his soul up to heaven, 
that the two fellows might well behold it. 
Also the two fellows saw come from heaven 
an hand, but they saw not the body. And 
then it came right to the Vessel, and took 
it and the spear, and so bare it up to 
heaven. Sithen was there never man so 
hardy to say that he had seen the Sangreal.41

Usually, however, the knight or lady is dying rapidly when 
the sacrament is administered. Sir Balin, for example, begs 
a damsel to fetch a priest:

Now will ye send for a priest, that we 
may receive our sacrament, and receive 
the blessed body of Our Lord Jesu Christ? 
Yea, said the lady, it shall be done; and 
so she sent for a priest and gave them 
their rites.42

41 Ibid., II, 268. 
42 Ibid., I, 69.
King Hermance, too, slain by two of his own knights, hands over all his lands to his revenger-to-be, receives his Creator and dies. Sir Percivale and Sir Ector, too far gone in their weakness and wounds, are unable to get a priest and "receive their Savior." A miraculous appearance of the Holy Grail allows them to partake of the Blessed Sacrament and they are made whole:

Sir Percivale...kneeled down and made his prayer devoutly unto Almighty Jesu, for he was one of the best knights of the world that at that time was, in whom the very faith stood most in. Right so there came by the holy vessel of the Sangreal with all manner of sweetness and savour;...and forthwith they both were as whole of hide and limb as ever they were in their life days: then they gave thankings to God with great mildness. O Jesu, said Sir Percivale, what may this mean, that we be thus healed, and right now we were at the point of dying? I wot full well, said Sir Ector, what it is; it is an holy vessel...and therein is part of the holy blood of our Lord Jesu Christ, blessed mote he be.

Sir Melias, in danger of death, receives his Creator, too; but he also is healed:

...and Sir Galahad start up behind him and held him in his arms, and so brought him to the abbey, and there unarmed him and brought him to his chamber. And then he asked for his Saviour. And when he had received Him he said unto Sir Galahad: Sir, let death dome when it pleaseth. And therewith he drew out the truncheon of the spear out of his body: and then he swooned...And an old monk...anon said to Sir Galahad: I shall heal him of his wound, but by the grace of God, within the term of seven weeks.
King Evelake, who has seen Joseph of Aramathea, receives communion frequently, for he is three hundred years old and lies in his sick bed close to a monastery altar:

Sir Percivale...on the right side saw a pew closed with iron, and behind the altar he saw a rich bed and a fair, as of cloth of silk and gold. Then Sir Percivale espied that therein was a man or a woman, for the visage was covered; then he left off his looking and heard his service. And when it came to the saecring, he that lay within that periculoos dressed him up, and uncovered his head; and then him seemed a passing old man, and he had a crown of gold upon his head, and his shoulders were naked and unhilled unto his navel. And then Sir Percivale espied his body was full of great wounds, both on the shoulders, arms, and visage. And ever he held up his hands against our Lord's body, and cried: Fair, sweet Father, Jesu Christ, forget not me. And so he lay down, but always he was in his prayers and orisons; and him seemed to be of the age of three hundred winter. And when the mass was done the priest took Our Lord's body and bare it to the sick king. And when he had used it he did off his crown, and commanded the crown to be set on the altar...Then this king cried mercy, and said: Fair, Lord, let me never die till the good knight of my blood of the ninth degree be come, that I may see him openly that he shall achieve the Sangreal, that I may kiss him.46

As we have seen, Elaine also receives the sacrament of the Eucharist on her death bed. 47 And Sir Uwaine, wounded in a fight

46 Ibid., II, 194-5.
47 Ibid., II, 303.
is hurried to a nearby abbey where he receives his Saviour and dies:

...then said Gawaine, Ye must yield you as an overcome man, or else I may slay you. Ah, sir knight, said Uwaine, I am dead, for God's sake and of your gentleness lead me here unto an abbey that I may receive my Creator; ...and anon he so came to an abbey where they were well received; and anon he was unarmed, and received his Creator. Then he prayed Gawaine to draw out the truncheon of the spear out of his body... and Sir Gawaine drew out the truncheon of the spear, and anon departed the soul from the body.48

Later on, King Arthur sees to it that Sir Gawaine receives communion before he expires:

And then Sir Gawaine wept, and King Arthur wept; and then they swooned both. And when they awaked both, the king made Sir Gawaine receive his Saviour... And so at the hour of noon Sir Gawaine yielded up the spirit...49

These are the sole instances in the Morte where we can definitely say that the characters receive their Blessed Lord. Many writers have been puzzled by this infrequency of receiving Holy Communion in the lives of the people of the Middle Ages. How is it, they ask, that the period wherein the Catholic Church was strongest and most supreme coincides with the period when the practice of receiving Holy Communion was most infrequent? Bishop John Hedley asks this question, too, and gives in his answer

48 Ibid., II, 216.
49 Ibid., II, 383.
three reasons:

One was...the cessation of canonical penances, combined with a lingering persuasion that penance for mortal sin must still be lengthy, and severe...Another reason was that devotion...to the Blessed Sacrament grew and developed during the Middle Ages; devotion as distinguished from use. The institution of the festival of Corpus Christi in the thirteenth century marked a stage in this development with which we are all familiar...there was a deepening of reverential fear that was providential and salutary...

Then, thirdly, there was...the acute consciousness of sin. The personal sense of the sinfulness of sin grew steadily as the Pagan ideals of human life were effaced by the spread of a more and more personal love of God. Consciences were more diligently searched, and the necessity of confession more earnestly realized.50

But if the characters of the Morte do not partake of the Blessed Sacrament as much as they might, they are more than eager to participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Christ had two purposes in mind when He instituted this sacrament. First, He wanted His Body and Blood to be the celestial food of the soul, preserving and supporting the life. Second, He wanted to give to His Church a perpetual sacrifice, in expiation for sin and atonement for the many crimes men had committed and would commit against the Divine Majesty, so that the

divine wrath might be changed to mercy, from the severity of just
vengeance to the exercise of benignant clemency. 51 This aspect
of the Holy Eucharist is the one that pleases the heart of the
knight. He knows he is participating in this Holy Sacrifice of
praise, adoration, petition, thanksgiving, and propitiation. 52
Though he does not receive his Blessed Lord into his very body,
he comes to Mass to gain the other "sacrificial fruits."

It is an historical fact that regular attendance at Mass,
even daily attendance, was the custom among Catholic Englishmen
of the Middle Ages, where this was in any way possible. 53 Sir
Galahad, then, follows the spirit of the day when he insists on
regular attendance at the Holy Sacrifice:

And at the last it happened him to depart
from a place or a castle the which was
named Abblasoure; and he had heard no mass,
the which he was wont ever to hear or ever
he departed out of any castle or place,
and kept that for a custom. Then Sir Galahad
came unto a mountain where he found
an old chapel, and found there nobody, for
all was desolate; and there he knelted
tofore the altar, and besought God of whole-
some counsel. 54

Although the other characters may not have been as observant
of this custom as Galahad, nevertheless they rarely let slip an

51 Catechism of the Council of Trent, 172.
52 Nicholas Gihr, The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, trans. from
the German, B. Herder, St. Louis, 1939, 148, 153, 156, 169.
53 Cardinal Gasquet, England under the Old Religion, G. Bell &
54 Malory, II, 182.
opportunity of attending the Holy Sacrifice. References to this holy practice are numerous, and we can mention first the many casual comments of the knights hearing Mass. Frequently there occurs hardly more than the phrase "...and they devoutly heard their mass." A typical sentence is: "There they rested them all night till on the morn, and heard a mass devoutly, and took their leave of the hermit, and Sir Tor prayed the hermit to pray for him." Or again: "Launcelot...at last came to a white abbey, and there they made him that night great cheer; and on the morrow he rose and heard mass." Later we shall look more closely at many of the more significant passages in which Mass is celebrated; but here are more instances that give the same parenthetical references. King Arthur and two associate kings "on the morn heard mass, and to dinner, and so to their council of war." It was the custom to have daily Mass at the castle of King Pellinor, too, and all wayfaring knights attended. Sir Damas tells Arthur no one can go to the jousting-field until Mass is heard:

So on the morn Sir Arthur was armed and well horsed, and asked Sir Damas, When shall we to the field? Sir, said Sir Damas, ye shall hear mass. And so Arthur heard a mass, and when mass was done there came a squire on a great horse and asked Sir Damas if his knight were

55 Ibid., I, 82.
56 Ibid., II, 260.
57 Ibid., I, 20.
58 Ibid., I, 87.
ready, for our knight is ready in the field.\textsuperscript{59}

And when Sir Gawaine joins with his ejected brother Uwaine the first thing they do is hear Mass in a nearby abbey:

King Arthur said...as for your son, Sir Uwaine, I hold him suspect, therefore I charge you put him out of my court. So Sir Uwaine was discharged. And when Sir Gawaine wist that, he made ready to go with him; and said, Whoso shall banish my cousin-germain shall banish me. So they two departed, and rode into a great forest, and so they came to an abbey of monks, and there were well-lodged...So on the morn they heard their masses in the abbey, and so they rode forth...\textsuperscript{60}

All through their travels they hear Mass at every possible stopping place.\textsuperscript{61} While Beaumains, the nobleman disguised as a kitchen-knave, is suffering the abuse of the damsel whom he has sworn to serve, he finds solace in attending Mass frequently:

And ever she rebuked Beaumains, and would not suffer him to sit at her table, but as the green knight took him and sat him at a side table...And so that night they yede unto rest...And so on the morn they all arose, and heard their mass, and brake their fast; and then they took their horses and rode on their way...\textsuperscript{62}

But always the damsel spake many foul words unto Beaumains, whereof the red knight had great marvel...And upon the morn they heard mass and dined...\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., I, 101.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., I, 111.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., I, 128.  
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., I, 193.  
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., I, 195; also 199.
Beaumains lay all night in the hermitage; and upon the morn he and the damsel Linet heard their mass and brake their fast. 64

Sir Gareth during his hard ride had worked up an appetite for himself:

Then was he set unto supper, and had many good dishes. Then Sir Gareth list well to eat, and knightly he ate his meat, and eagerly; there was many a fair lady by him, and some said they never saw a goodlier man nor so well of eating. Then they made him passing good cheer, and shortly when he had supped his bed was made there; so he rested him all night. And on the morn he heard mass, and brake his fast and took his leave at the duchess, and at them all; and thanked her goodly of her lodging, and of his good cheer...65

Thus fortified with the good food and the Mass, Gareth later rescues thirty damsels from a cruel knight and hears mass in their former prison. 66 Sir Percivale hears Mass at Sir Persides' castle, 67 and often stops at monasteries for the same pious purpose:

And so he rode till evensong time. And then he heard a clock smite; and then he was ware of an house closed well with walls and deep ditches, and there he knocked at the gate and was let in, and he alit and was led unto a chamber, and soon he was unarmed. And there he had good cheer all that night; and on the morn he heard his mass, and in the monastery he found a priest ready at the altar. 68

64 Ibid., I, 202.
65 Ibid., I, 230.
66 Ibid., I, 232.
67 Ibid., II, 142.
68 Ibid., II, 194.
King Arthur weeps as he sees Gawaine and Launcelot just before they set out in quest of the Sangreal:

And as soon as it was day the king arose, for he had no rest of all that night for sorrow. Then he went unto Gawaine and to Sir Launcelot that were arisen for to hear mass. And then the king again said: Gawaine, Gawaine, ... and therewith the tears began to run down his visage. And then the king and queen went unto the minster. So anon Launcelot and Gawaine commanded their men to bring their arms. ... which were all ready in the same wise, for to go to the minster to hear their service. And then after the service was done the king would wit how many had undertaken the quest of the Holy Grail; and to account them he prayed them all.69

Sir Galahad rarely misses a day, when on the quest, and Gawaine on his trail does as well.70 Launcelot, on the same quest, feels remorse for his numerous sins and seeks out a hermit in order to confess; but first he hears his Mass:

Then he departed him from the cross on foot into a forest; and so by prime he came to an high hill, and found an hermitage and a hermit therein which was going unto mass. And then Launcelot kneeled down and cried on Our Lord mercy for his wicked works. So when mass was done Launcelot called him, and prayed him for charity for to hear his life. With a good will, said the good man.72

Later, still suffering from the rough hairshirt, he devoutly

69 Ibid., II, 173.
70 Ibid., II, 175, 182, 261.
71 Ibid., II, 185.
72 Ibid., II, 189.
Sir Galahad and Percivale hear Mass at the latter's sister's castle while attending a sick damsel who, when dying, gives a prophetic message:

That night were the three fellows eased with the best; and on the morn they heard mass, and Sir Percivale's sister bade bring forth the sick lady. So she was, the which was evil at ease. Then said she: Who shall let me blood? So one came forth and let her blood, and she bled so much that the dish was full...With that she fell in a swoon. Then Galahad and his two fellows start up to her and lift her up and staunched her, but she had bled so much that she might not live. Then she said when she was awaked: Fair brother Percivale, I die for the healing of this lady, so I require you that ye bury me not in this country, but as soon as I am dead put me in a boat at the next haven, and let me go as adventure will lead me; and as soon as ye three come to the City of Sarras, there to achieve the Holy Grail, ye shall find me under a tower arrived, and there bury me in the spiritual place; for I say you so much, there Galahad shall be buried, and ye also, in the same place.

This prophetic message of the burial place of Galahad is fulfilled to the letter.

Sir Launcelot hears Mass on the morning he meets Elaine, the fair maid of Astolat:

73 Ibid., II, 210.
74 Ibid., II, 252.
And so upon the morn early Sir Launcelot heard mass and brake his fast, and so took leave of the queen and departed. And then he rode so much until he came to Astolat, that is Gilford.  

These passages quoted above have been the more or less parenthetical references which Malory makes to the practice of his characters' devout attendance at Mass. Such a practice is the custom of the day. But the Sacrifice of the Mass is also offered on very solemn occasions. We will see that the marriage service is an occasion for days of extraordinary liturgical splendor. We may assume the same for the numerous feast days mentioned, such as Christmas, Whitsuntide, Michelmas, Trinity Sunday, Easter, Candlemas, etc. But there are several other occasions. For example, in the very beginning of the romance, when King Uther Pendragon dies, the Archbishop, by advice of Merlin, sends for "all the lords and gentlemen of arms" to come to London. These worthy men, about to select a King, go first to Matins and Mass. Later they discover the stone with the sword Excalibur sticking in it. The Archbishop immediately orders prayers to be said and "that no man touch the sword till the high mass be all done." It is only then that the knights present are allowed to try their hand at drawing forth the sword.

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75 Ibid., II, 284.
76 Ibid., I, 10, 11.
It is also customary to hear Mass before setting out on a dangerous mission, as does Sir Morhaus before encountering an evil Duke and his four sons.\textsuperscript{77} Tourneys and jousts are opened on big feast days, the Assumption, for example:

And upon the Assumption Day, when mass and matins were done, there were heralds with trumpets commanded to blow to the field...

And so there came out...the knights...\textsuperscript{78}

And once the tourney is begun, action on the jousting-field is preceded each morning with a high Mass:

So on the morn they heard their mass, and blew the field, and then knights made them ready...thus they made great joy till on the morn, and then they heard mass, and blew to field.\textsuperscript{79}

The office of Knighthood is also bestowed at Mass, Alisander and twenty others receiving this honor before the Holy Altar:

Now it will be well done that he may be made knight at our Lady Day in Lent...

So came the constable to Alisander, and told him that he should at our Lady Day in Lent be made knight. I thank God, said Alisander; these are the best tidings that ever came to me. Then...there were ordained twenty of the greatest gentlemen's sons, and the best born men of the country, that should be made knights that same day that Alisander was made knight. So on the same day that Alisander and his twenty fellows were made knights, at the offering of the mass there came Anglides unto her son and said thus: O fair sweet son, I charge upon thee my blessing...\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., I, 125.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., I, 224.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., II, 48, 50.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., II, 28.
It was during Mass that Launcelot has his conversion and
begrts the Bishop to allow him to become a priest and receive the
habit:

And at last he was ware of an hermitage
and a chapel stood betwixt two cliffs;
and then he heard a little bell ring to
mass, and thither he rode and alit, and
tied his horse to the gate, and heard
mass. And he that sang that mass was
Bishop of Canterbury. Both the Bishop
and Sir Bedivere knew Sir Launcelot,
and they spake together after mass. But
when Sir Bedivere told his tale all whole,
Sir Launcelot's heart almost brast for
sorrow, and Sir Launcelot threw his arms
abroad, and said: Alas, who may trust
this world. And when he knelleded down
on his knee, and prayed the Bishop to
shrive and assoil him. And then he be-
sought the Bishop that he might be his
brother. Then the Bishop said: I will
gladly; and there he put an habit upon
Sir Launcelot, and there he served God
day and night with prayers and fastings.81

And it is a happy day for Launcelot when he sings his first Mass.82

Almost all the Masses referred to in the quest of the Holy
Grail are extraordinary for some reason or other. For example,
at the very beginning of the quest, "the King and all his knights
were just come from the service" on Whitsunday, when they find
in the hall the prophetic message written on the Siege Perilous
concerning the coming of Sir Galahad.83 As the search progresses,

81 Ibid., II, 395.
82 Ibid., II, 396.
83 Ibid., II, 165.
Sir Bors, one of the questers, a bit bewildered in his pursuit of the Holy Grail, receives sage counsel from an abbot:

Then they supposed that he was one of the quest of the Sangreal, so they led him into a chamber and unarmed him. Sirs, said Sir Bors, if there be an holy man in this house I pray you let me speak with him. Then one of them led him unto the Abbot, which was in a Chaple. And then Sir Bors saluted him, and he him again. Sir, said Sir Bors, I am a knight errant; and told him all the adventure which he had seen. Sir Knight, said the Abbot, I wot not what ye be, for I weened never that a knight of your age might have been so strong in the grace of our Lord Jesu Christ. Not for then ye shall go unto your rest, for I will not counsel you this day, it is too late, and to-morrow I shall counsel you as I can...And that night Sir Bors served richly; and on the morn early he heard mass, and the Abbot came to him, and bad him good morrow, and Bors to him again. And then he told him he was a fellow of the quest of the Sangreal...and then the Abbot counseled him...84

On another occasion, special omens and tokens take place "at the secrets of the mass" when Galahad and Percivale see a hart become a man and take up "a siege upon the altar."85 When this phenomenon and many others have been explained by the holy priest they hear another Mass and depart.86

Sir Launcelot's only glimpse of the Sangreal (he was unable to find and touch it because of his sins of the flesh) was had

84 Ibid., II, 229.
85 Ibid., II, 249.
86 Ibid., II, 250.
Then Launcelot kneeled down tofore the chamber, for well wist he that there was the Sangreal within that chamber. Then said he:
Fair sweet Father, Jesu Christ, if ever I did thing that pleased Thee, Lord for Thy pity never have me not in despite for my sins done aforetime, and that Thou show me something of that I seek. And with that he saw the chamber door open, and there came out a great clereness, that the house was as bright as all the torches of the world had been there. So came he to the chamber door, and would have entered, and anon a voice said to him, Flee, Launcelot, and enter not, for thou oughtest not to do it; and if thou enter thou shalt forethink it. Then he withdrew him aback right heavy. Then he looked up in the middes of the chamber, and saw a table of silver, and the holy vessel, covered with red samite, and many angels about it, whereof one held a candle of wax burning, and the other held a cross, and the ornaments of an altar. And before the holy vessel he saw a good man clothed as a priest. And it seemed that he was at the sacring of the mass.87

It is at the Mass of Our Lady that Sir Galahad achieves his goal: he finds the Sangreal and peacefully dies. Malory tells the story:

Galahad...arose up early and his fellows and came to the place of the palace, and saw tofore them the holy vessel, and a man kneeling on his knees in likeness of a bishop, that had about him a great fellowship of angels as it had been Jesu Christ himself; and then he arose and began a mass of Our Lady. And when he came to the

87 Ibid., II, 257-8.
The Requiem Mass was an established part of the burial service, even as it is today in the Catholic Church. Requiem Masses are those offered for the dead, deriving its name from the first word of the Introit of that particular Mass: "Requiem aeternam, etc." From the first centuries Masses and prayers were said that the dead might attain eternal rest. The characters of the Morte take this counsel quite seriously. Sir Launcelot, for instance, plays the part of a mourner at the Requiem Mass of a dead knight. And he is also present at the services of the sorrowful internment of the Fair Maid of Astolat; it is "Sir Launcelot who offered her mass-penny."
As Le Morte D'Arthur draws to a close, Requiem Masses are said for many of the outstanding characters. Gawaine is laid to rest: "And on the morn all the priests and dukes that might be gotten in the country were there, and sang a mass of requiem."93 And Sir Launcelot arrives a half hour after the death of Guinever:

Then Sir Launcelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the dirge at night, and on the morn he sang mass.94

But it was not for him to sing her burial Mass: "The Bishop of Canterbury sang the mass of requiem with great devotion."95 A short time later, a few months, the Bishop "did his mass of requiem" for Launcelot himself,96 Then the knight-priest is laid to rest "in the quire of the Joyous Gard."

As a source of grace, then, the Holy Eucharist, under both its phases (as sacrifice and as sacrament), was regarded far and above any other source in its dignity and efficacy. It is a sacrament in which all the faithful could participate.

Two sacraments, however, which are not common to all (only adults may receive them), are Holy Orders and Matrimony. Only one specific mention of Holy Orders (already noted), is made in

93 Ibid., II, 393.
94 Ibid., II, 397.
95 Ibid., II, 398.
96 Ibid., II, 399.
the whole Morte. This is the ordination of Sir Launcelot by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Several other knights, seeing Launcelot's fine example, begged for Holy Orders, too:

And when Sir Bors saw Sir Launcelot in that manner of clothing, then he prayed the Bishop that he might be in the same suit. And so there was an habit put upon him, and there he lived in prayers and fasting. And within half a year, there was come Sir Galihud, Sir Galihodin, Sir Blamore, Sir Bleoberis, Sir Villiars, Sir Clerras, and Sir Gahalantine. So all these seven knights there abode still. And when they saw Sir Launcelot had taken him to such perfection, they had no list to depart, but took such an habit as he had... And there was none of these other knights, but they read in books, and holp for to sing mass, and rang bells... And so their horses went where they would, for they took no regard of no worldly riches.

For the most part, too, it is understood that, whenever mention is made of a monk, or hermit, or holy man, he has received the sacrament of Holy Orders from his Bishop. Otherwise we would not see these "holy hermits" as dispensers of the sacraments of Penance and of the Holy Eucharist. A priest is regarded, and rightly so, by the knights and ladies as the representative of God on earth, commissioned in His name to teach the law of God. They recognize that he has the supreme power of changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ; that he also has the

97 Ibid., II, 396.
98 Ibid., II, 396-7.
power to forgive sins, and to administer most of the other sacraments. Consequently, it is to the priest, or to the Bishop, that they come, as to one whose office transcends all others, for guidance, confession, and communion. We have seen many instances of this already; we shall see more.

Matrimony is a sacrament entered into with high seriousness by both men and women in the Morte. For them the word "Matrimony" holds the full meaning of marriage: to bring about motherhood. Consequently, the characters request that it be surrounded by the noblest pomp and liturgical ceremony the Church is able to afford. Thus, when Arthur and Guinever are married:

Then was the high feast made ready, and the King was wedded at Camelot unto Dame Guinever in the Church of St. Stephen, with great solemnity. Preparations for this ceremony had been extensive: "...the King let ordain for the marriage and the coronation in the most honorable wise that could be desired." A triple wedding took place on the feast of Michelmas:

And upon Michelmas Day the Bishop of Canterbury made the wedding betwixt Sir Gareth and the Lady Lioness with great solemnity. And King Arthur made Gaheris wed the damosel Savage, that was Dame Linet, and King Arthur made Sir Agravaine to wed Dame Lioness'

99 Ibid., passim; cf. also Baltimore Catechism, 51.
100 Malory, I, 75.
101 Ibid., I, 72.
niece a fair lady, her name was Dame Laurel.102

It was a sad day for Sir Tristram when he saw King Mark and La Beale Isoud "richly wedded with great noblesse."103 But not long after Sir Tristram himself "...agreed to wed Isoud La Blanch Mains. And at last they were wedded, and solemnly held their marriage."104

When some of the minor characters are married mention is hardly made of the fact; a brief, passing reference is all that is necessary. For example, King Uther and his Queen Igraine "were married in a morning with great mirth and joy."105 Breunor le Noire weds the damsel Maledisant on Pentecost, after which she is called Beauvivante.106 Finally, Sir Lavaine "cast his love unto Dame Feleololie...and they wedded together with great joy."107

The sacrament of Marriage is entered into only once by both parties; only death could dissolve the knot. Such is taken for granted; we find not the slightest hint that a man could leave his wife through legal divorce. True love, says Malory, is the

102 Ibid., I, 236.
103 Ibid., I, 278.
104 Ibid., I, 290.
105 Ibid., I, 8.
106 Ibid., I, 313.
107 Ibid., II, 338.
cause of this:

Nowadays right so fareth love, soon hot soon cold: this is no stability. But the old love was not so; men and women could love together...and no lycourse lusts were between them, and then was love, truth, and faithfulness; and lo, in likewise was used love in King Arthurs' days.108

For everyone, then, it is a sacrament of the highest dignity, if for no other reason than that the grace conferred at marriage had been won for them by Christ during His Passion.

Although Extreme Unction is never mentioned by this familiar name, it is referred to as the "last sacrament" or "rites" or "receiving my Saviour." The anointing, the prayers, the blessing of the dying person, and the administration of Holy Viaticum were all part of the ceremony, a ritual so familiar to the author and his readers that the mere mention of the Eucharist is often sufficient to call up the whole scene and ceremony. What were the benefits the characters wished to receive? First of all, this sacrament, if received with the correct dispositions, remits all venial sin; it removes the languor often entailed by sin, by sharpening the dulled sense of conscience lying dormant in the dying man's heart. Secondly, it quiets one's fears, by illumining the gloom in which the soul is enveloped, filling it with pious and holy joy, and enabling one to wait with cheerfulness the coming

108 Ibid., II, 315.
of the Lord. Thirdly, it fortifies one against the last violent assaults of Satan. Thus, when Balan and Balin the brothers are about to die, they beg for a priest:

Now send for a priest, that we may receive our Sacrament, and receive the blessed body of our Lord Jesu Christ...and a priest gave them their last rites...Now, said Balan,...there will never good knight nor good man see our tomb but they will pray for our souls.

King Pellinore found a dead knight, took him on his shoulders to a hermitage, and "charged the hermit with the corpse, that service should be done for the soul." Mention has already been made of the dumb maiden who miraculously proclaimed Sir Percivale's dignity and then died with full rites and the blessings of confession and communion. King Hermance receives the last sacraments, as does Sir Melias and Lord Earl Hernox. Elaine's "ghostly" father is at her bedside, and Sir Gawaine "yielded up his spirit" after receiving his Saviour.

Sir Launcelot's last illness is not taken seriously by his Bishop and fellows, so that he has to beg for his last rites:

Then Sir Launcelot said with dreary steven:
Sir Bishop, I pray you give me all my rites

109 Catechism of the Council of Trent, 210 ff.
110 Malory, I, 69.
111 Ibid., I, 88.
112 Ibid., II, 13.
113 Ibid., II, 76.
114 Ibid., II, 181.
115 Ibid., II, 248.
116 Ibid., II, 303.
117 Ibid., II, 383.
that longeth to a Christian man. It shall not need you, said the hermit, and all his fellows, it is but the heaviness of your blood... My fair lords, said Sir Launcelot, wit you well my careful body will into the earth, I have warning now more than I will say; therefore give me my rites. So when he was houseld and enelid, and had all that a Christian man ought to have, he prayed the Bishop and his fellows might bear his body to the Joyous Gard.118

The characters wished true, both for themselves and for all others, these words of St. John: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."119

When we speak of the "Last Rites" nowadays, we usually couple together the idea of the sacrament of Extreme Unction and the last acts of the Christian burial. Malory's characters so link them, too. Every death is treated as a solemn moment, and the body of the deceased is laid to rest in a devout and decent manner. It is Christian becomingness that prompts the people to bury their friends with solemn ceremonies. They realize they are not burying an animal, but that the corpse they are sealing in the tomb has once been the temple of the Holy Ghost, a tabernacle wherein Our Savior has recently abided. King Uther, for instance, "yielded up the ghost, and then he was interred as longed to a King."120

118 Ibid., II, 399.
119 Apoc., XIV, 13.
120 Malory, I, 10.
King Arthur and all of his court feel a great grief and shame at the death of the Lady of the Lake, and they "buried her richly." King Mark, too, wretch though he is, otherwise makes it his business to see that two knights are properly buried. He says:

I will not depart till I have on this earth made a tomb; and there he pyght his pavilions and sought through all the country to find a tomb, and in a church they found one was fair and rich, and then the King let put them both, in the earth, and put the tomb upon them, and wrote the names of both on the tomb.

After a mighty battle in which King Lot and twelve other Kings are killed, they "...were all buried in the Church of St. Stephen, in Camelot, and the remnants of Knights and of others were buried in a great rock." King Arthur mourns the death of King Lot exceedingly and from his solicitous care of the latter's tomb we gain some idea of the respect and love the people of the Middle Ages have for their deceased friends.

King Arthur let make the tomb of King Lot passing richly, and made his tomb by his own; and then Arthur let make twelve images of laton and copper, and overgilt it with gold, in the sign of twelve kings, and each one of them held a taper of wax that burnt day and night.

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121 Ibid., I, 50.
122 Ibid., I, 54.
123 Ibid., I, 58.
124 Ibid., I, 59.
The good King Arthur also sees to the burial of Herlows le Berbeus;[125] and Accolon is buried at the Church of Dame Morgan le Fay.[126] Sir Tristram, about to set out against King Mark, bids his servant Gouvernail to inter his body as would seem best.[127] But this is an unnecessary precaution, for Sir Tristram lives to kill many a knight, another of whom is buried by Dame Morgan le Fay:

For with great pain his varlet brought him to the castle, and there Sir Hemison fell down dead. When Morgan le Fay saw him dead she made great sorrow out of reason; and then she let despoil him unto his shirt, and so she let him put into a tomb. And about the tomb she let write: Here lieth Sir Hemison, slain by the hands of Sir Tristram de Liones.[128]

Prince Boudwin meets a sorry end before his bride's eyes, and is buried:

King Mark...threewith struck him to the heart with a dagger, that he never spake word. Then the lady Anglides made great dole, and swooned, for she saw her lord slain afore her face. Then was there no more to do but Prince Boudwin was despoiled and brought to burial...Then was there much sorrow and crying, and great dole, made Sir Tristram, Sir Dinas, Sir Gergus, and so did all knights that were there, for that prince was passingly well beloved.[129]

125 Ibid., I, 61.
126 Ibid., I, 108.
127 Ibid., I, 246.
128 Ibid., I, 368.
129 Ibid., II, 27.
The Paynims were buried in a Christian manner, but this is not for love of the infidel, but because there "came a stink from his body when the soul departed, that there might nobody abide the savour."\textsuperscript{130} The four cousins of King Mark are buried in chapel.\textsuperscript{131} And even a false knight slain during a nocturnal battle is directly and decently interred on the morrow by his opponent, Sir Aglovale:

And within a while Sir Percivale had slain all that would withstand him; for Sir Percivale dealt so his strokes that were so rude that there durst no man abide him. And within a while Sir Aglovale had Sir Goodewin at the earth, and there he unlace his helm, and struck off his head. And then they departed and took their horses; and then they let carry the dead squire un- to a priory, and there they interred him.\textsuperscript{132}

Gawaine and Ector "buried Uwayne as men ought to bury a king's son";\textsuperscript{133} and it is Sir Bors' first thought on finding his brother Lionel's body to seek a chapel and "put him into a tomb of marble."\textsuperscript{134} Galahad puts King Moudrains "in the earth as a king ought to be."\textsuperscript{135} And Later joined with Bors and Percivale in burying the latter's sister "as a king's daughter ought to be."\textsuperscript{136}

The beautiful death of Sir Galahad is followed by a simple

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., II, 48.  
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., II, 54.  
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., II, 140.  
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., II, 216.  
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., II, 226.  
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., II, 262.  
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., II, 267.
burial, for his companions are in a hurry to get to a monastery and don the religious habit:

When Percivale and Bors saw Galahad dead they made as much sorrow as ever did two men. And if they had not been good men they might lightly have fallen in despair. And the people of the country and of the city were right heavy. And then he was buried; and as soon as he was buried Sir Percivale yielded him to hermitage out of the city, and took a religious clothing ... Thus a year and two months lived Sir Percivale in the hermitage a full holy life, and then passed out of this world; and Bors let bury him by his sister and by Galahad in the spiritualities.137

Sir Pinel, who ate the possibly poisoned apples intended for Gawaine, received posthumous honors by being interred in a tomb in the Church of Westminster.138 Sir Launcelot himself took part in the burial of Elaine of Astolat, who is 'interred richly.'139 The pleadings of the Knights of the Table Round are necessary before Arthur will suffer Sir Meliagrance, an unfaithful knight, to be buried.140 But it is Arthur who hurries the internment of Gareth, lest the sight of his dead brother cause Sir Gawaine undue grief.141 It is also the custom to cease hostilities during battle in order that each side might bury its dead:

And then within a little while, by evening song time, Sir Launcelot and his party

137 Ibid., II, 269.
138 Ibid., II, 283.
139 Ibid., II, 306.
140 Ibid., II, 331.
141 Ibid., II, 355.
better stood, for their horses went in blood past the fetlocks, there was so much people slain. And then for pity, Sir Launcelot withheld his knights, and suffered King Arthur's party to withdraw them into his side. And then Sir Launcelot's party withdrew them into his castle and either parties buried the dead, and put salve unto the wounded men.142

Just before his death Sir Gawaine writes a letter to Sir Launcelot pleading for his prayers and begging him to come and see his tomb. Arthur sees to it that he is buried in the chapel of Dover Castle "where all men yet may see the skull of him."143 King Arthur, in turn, is buried by a hermit who does not know him, and his fresh grave is discovered by accident by Sir Bedivere, who remains there at the tomb "to live with fastings and prayers" all the days of his life.144

Queen Guinever has a more spectacular funeral than her King-husband:

...she was wrapped in cored cloth of Raines, from the top to the toe, in thirty-fold; and after she was put in a web of lead, and then in a coffin of marble.145

But it is at the burial of Sir Launcelot that we see a word picture of what a funeral could be when everyone lends himself to its sorrowful splendors:

142 Ibid., II, 361.
143 Ibid., II, 383.
144 Ibid., II, 390.
145 Ibid., II, 398.
So when Sir Bors and his fellows came to his bed they found Launcelot stark dead, and he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savour about him that ever they felt. Then was there weeping and wringing of hands, and the greatest dole they made that ever made man. And on the morn the Bishop did his mass of Requiem; and after, the Bishop and all the nine knights put Sir Launcelot in the same horse bier that Queen Guinever was laid in tofore that she was buried. And so the Bishop and they all together went with the body of Sir Launcelot daily till they came to the Joyous Gard; and ever they had an hundred torches burning about him. And so within fifteen days they came to Joyous Gard. And there they laid his corpse in the body of the quire, and sang and read many psalters and prayers over him and about him. And ever his visage was laid open and naked, that all folks might behold him. For such as the custome of those days, that all men of worship should so lie open with visage till that they were buried. And right thus as they were at their service, there came Sir Ector de Maris, that had seven years sought all England, Scotland, and Wales, seeking his brother, Sir Launcelot.146

A more magnificent burial would be hard to imagine even in our own day.

This chapter has been a collocation of the more significant passages manifesting the life of the characters as it centered around the sacraments. The fact, or theme, which these many citations have striven to exemplify is this: human nature is weak, and needs plenty of strengthening; the grace of Christ, won on

146 Ibid., II, 399.
Calvary and dispensed through the seven sacraments, is the main source of that strengthening power. The knights and ladies of the Morte, no less than the Catholics of other ages, know and appreciate this fortifying grace; they know, receive, and are strengthened by it. But more of this in our concluding chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE IN LE MORTE D'ARTHUR: PART II

In the course of the second chapter we distinguished carefully between the sacraments and the sacramentals, and we wish now to inquire into this "sacramental" life. The sacraments, as we saw, were instituted by our Lord Himself, and of themselves either give or increase sanctifying grace. But the sacramentals are of ecclesiastical origin; they are actions or objects set aside or blessed by the Church, and in their performance or use bear some resemblance to a sacrament. Sacramentals are intended to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion. The characters of the Morte hold these sacramentals to be gifts of rare value, chiefly because they are symbolical of these beautiful thoughts and inspiring sentiments. The sign of the Cross, for example, and devotion to the holy Crosses in the forests and along the roadsides are among the most frequently mentioned sacramentals:

Then he awaked and made a sign of the cross in the middes of the forehead, and so rose and clothed him. And there came the lady of the place, and she saluted him, and he her again, and so went to a chapel, and heard their service.¹

That night Bors rested him there; and in his sleep there came a voice to him and goodly bad him go to the sea. Then he start up and made a sign of the Cross in the middle of his forehead, and took his harness, and made ready his horse, and mounted upon him; and at a broken wall he rode out, and rode so long till that he came to the sea.2

The knights also use the Crosses set up in the forests and along the waysides for suitable places to spend the night, to use as a goal, and so forth. Sir Launcelot, on one occasion,

...rode till that he came to a Cross, and took that for his host as for that night... and he made his prayers unto the Cross, that he never fall in deadly sin again.3

The knights frequently encounter these wayside reminders of their Savior's passion:

Sir Bagdemagus...suddenly departed from the court, and took his squire with him, and rode long in a forest till they came to a cross, and there alit and said his prayers devoutly.4

Sir Launcelot rode overthwart, and end-long in a wild forest, and held no path but as wild adventure led him. And at last he came to a stony cross...and came to his horse and did off his saddle and bridle, and let him pasture, and unlaced his helm, and ungirt his sword, and laid him down to sleep upon his shield tofore the cross.5

2 Ibid., II, 235.
3 Ibid., II, 207-8.
4 Ibid., I, 96.
5 Ibid., II, 187. Cf. also I, 66; 109, 116.; II, 188.
The knights also sometimes use the wayside crosses as meeting places, or places of departure from one another. "Then the two knights took their horses and at the cross they departed."6

Another form of the cross which the knights venerate and are accustomed to swear by, is the cross formed by the hilt of their massive swords. King Mark "swore upon the cross of the sword" to Sir Gaheris that never again would he oppose a knight-errant.7 Eight surviving knights of the original multitude that faced Sir Lamorak are forced to swear by their swords:

Then he dressed him again to the castle, and jousted with seven knights more, and there was none of them might withstand him, but he bare him to the earth. And of these twelve knights he slew in plain jousts four. And the eight knights he made them to swear on the cross of a sword that they should never use the evil customs of the castle. And when he had made them to swear that oath he let them pass.8

Sir Bora asks Sir Bromel to swear by his sword that he will deliver himself up to Launcelot "upon the Whitsunday that next cometh."9

Only one reference is made to swearing to, or by, the Holy Cross itself. This is done by a blasphemous knight who is determined that a maiden lend herself to the evil customs of his castle.10

6 Ibid., I, 317.
7 Ibid., I, 362.
8 Ibid., I, 398.
9 Ibid., II, 129.
10 Ibid., II, 250.
If any one thing was to be selected for the purpose of setting off the characters of the Morte, it could easily be their tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. Only true Catholics can have this devotion; Protestants know nothing about it. The Blessed Virgin, usually referred to as "Our Lady", is a miracle worker:

When Elizabeth, King Meliodas' wife, missed her lord, and she was nigh out of her wit, and also as great with child as she was, she took a gentlewoman with her, and ran into the forest to seek her lord. And when she was far in the forest she might go no farther, for she began to travail fast of her child. And she had many grimly throes; her gentlewoman helped her all that she might, and so by miracle of Our Lady of Heaven she was delivered with great pains. 11

Mary's influence and love even find a devoted son in Sir Palomides, the convert Paynim to be:

As for that, said Sir Palomides, I may not yet be christened, for one avow that I have made many years ago; howbeit in my heart I believe in Jesu Christ and his mild mother Mary; but I have but one battle to do, and when that is done I will be baptized with a good will. 12

Sir Lionel has mercy on a stricken maid "for Mary's sake." 13

And Mary's virginity is defended by a hermit who is talking to Bors, Galahad, and Percivale. These three have just witnessed

11 Ibid., I, 239.
12 Ibid., II, 160.
13 Ibid., II, 225.
a strange omen: four lions have been transformed into a man, a
lion, an eagle, and an ox, the four being led by a hart; all pass
into a chapel

...where they took their siege...and went
out through a glass window, and there was
nothing perished nor broken; and they heard
a voice say: In such manner entered the Son
of God in the womb of a maid Mary, whose
virginity ne was perished ne hurt.14

As mentioned previously, it is while attending devoutly at the
Mass of our Lady that Sir Galahad is vouchsafed to attain the
Holy Grail.15 It is fitting that the virgin-knight should be
so engaged.

As we noted before, there is another strong means of obtaining
God’s grace besides the sacraments and sacramentals; and that
is prayer. Prayer is the lifting up of our minds and hearts to
God to adore Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to ask His for-
giveness, and to beg Him for all the graces we need whether for
soul or body.16 The many references to prayer life of the char-
acters in the Morte are most interesting. For prayer was as
much a part of the daily life of the knights as eating, jousting,
and riding. Even public prayer is not a rarity. In his early
precarious days as King, Arthur has to fight many battles, and
he is ready to admit Heaven’s assistance:

14 Ibid., II, 249.
15 Ibid., II, 268.
16 A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, prepared by the Third Plen-
ary Council of Baltimore, Benziger Bros., New York, No. 2, 56.
Therewithal came King Arthur but with a few people, and slew on the left hand and on the right hand, that well-nigh there escaped no man, but all were slain to the number thirty thousand. And when the battle was all ended, the king kneeled down and thanked God meekly. And then he sent for the queen, and soon she was come, and she made great joy of the overcoming of that battle.17

Thanksgiving is again the keynote of the prayer sent up in common when Sir Launcelot saves a lady from a dragon:

And so Sir Launcelot went into the chamber that was as hot as any stew. And Sir Launcelot there took the fairest lady by the hand that ever he saw and she was as naked as a needle...Then the people brought her clothes. And when she was arrayed Sir Launcelot thought that she was the fairest lady of the world...Then this lady said to Sir Launcelot: Sir, if it please you will ye go with me hereby into a chapel that we may give loving and thanking unto God? Madam, said Sir Launcelot, come on with me, I will go with you. So when they came there and gave thankings to God all the people, both learned and lewde, gave thankings unto God and him...18

God is also called upon for succour in public prayer by many of the characters:

Then the giant anon started up, and took a great club in his hand, and smote at the king with it that his coranal fell to earth...Then the giant threw away his club, and caught the king in his arms that he crushed his ribs. Then the three maidens kneeled down and called to Christ for

17 Malory, I, 94.
18 Ibid., II, 125.
help and comfort of Arthur.19

The help prayed for is forthcoming in the persons of Sir Kay and Sir Howell, who happen along opportunely and slay the giant.

Another prayer of supplication is for the wounded Sir Bors:

Now saith the story that all night Galahad and Percivale were in a chapel in their prayers for to save Sir Bors...Then they departed and went into a forest. Now, said Percivale unto Galahad, we must depart, so pray we Our Lord that we many meet together in short time; then they did off their helms and kissed together, and wept at their departing.20

Private prayer, a talking of the individual with his God, recurs frequently. Palomides and Safere, for example, come upon an old gate-keeper "saying his prayers and beads."21 (We merely raise our eyebrows at this anachronistic reference to the recitation of the rosary which, in matter of fact, was not begun until the thirteenth century.) And Launcelot, we once saw, made "his prayers unto the Cross that he never fall in deadly sin again."22 Questers of the Sangreal pray whenever they find opportunity:

Thus as Ector and Gawaine rode more than eight days, and on a Saturday they found an old chapel, the which was wasted that there seemed that no one thither repaired; and there they alit, and set their spears at the door, and in they entered into the chapel, and there made their orisons a

19 Ibid., I, 137.
20 Ibid., II, 253.
21 Ibid., II, 116.
22 Ibid., II, 208.
great while, and set them down in the sicles of the chapel.23

Two others on the quest do likewise:

Sir Percivale was abashed of him, and he asked him what he was. Ah, fair sir, said Bors, know ye me not? Certes, said he, I marvel how ye came hither, but if Our Lord brought ye hither Himself...Then Sir Bors smiled and did off his helm. Then Sir Percivale knew him, and either made great joy of other that it was marvel to hear...So went they downward in the sea, one while backward, another while forward, and each comforted other, and oft were in their prayers. Then said Sir Percivale: We lack nothing but Galahad, the good knight.24

Later, when the "good knight" Galahad has joined with them, they again pray:

Then were they glad to have such things in their fellowship; and so they entered and made right great reverence thereto; and Galahad fell in his prayer a long time to Our Lord, that at what time he asked, that he should pass out of this world. So much he prayed till a voice said to him: Galahad, thou shalt have thy request; and when thou askest the death of thy body thou shalt have it, and then shalt thou find the life of the soul...And therefore I wot well, when my body is dead my soul shall be in great joy to see the Blessed Trinity every day, and the Majesty of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.25

We may recall that this fervent prayer is answered, for directly

23 Ibid., II, 214.
24 Ibid., II, 235.
25 Ibid., II, 266-7.
In seeing the Sangreal he again falls into prayer "and suddenly his soul departed to Jesu Christ, and a great multitude of angels bore his soul up to heaven." 26

Sir Launcelot always kneels and prays for a friend's soul:

Now, fair sirs, said Sir Launcelot, shew me the tomb of Sir Gawaine. And then certain people of the town brought him into Castle of Dover, and shewed him the tomb. Then Sir Launcelot kneeled down and wept, and prayed heartily for his soul. And that night he made a dole, and all they that would come had as much flesh, fish, and wine, and ale, and every man and woman had twelve pence, come who would. Thus with his own hand, dealt he this money, in a mourning gown; and ever he wept, and prayed them to pray for the soul of Sir Gawaine. 27

He also prays for the departed soul of his "fleshly love," Queen Guinever. 28 Indeed, it is a common enough request for a knight to beg his fellowman to pray for him. Sir Tor, for example, and his squire

...within awhile they came to a hermitage and took lodging; and was there grass, oats and bread for their horses; soon it was sped and full hard was their supper; but there they rested them all night till on the morn, and heard a mass devoutly, and took their leave of the hermit, and Sir Tor prayed the hermit to pray for him. He said he would, and betook him to God. 29

Although he knows himself to be most unworthy, Sir Launcelot always

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26 Ibid., II, 269.
27 Ibid., II, 292.
28 Ibid., II, 298.
29 Ibid., I, 82.
has supreme confidence in the prayers offered up for him by his son Sir Galahad:

Lo, Sir Launcelot, said the good man, there thou mightest understand the high lineage that thou art come of, and thine advision betokeneth... But little thank thou has given to God for all the great virtues that God hath lent thee. Sir, said Launcelot, ye say that that good knight is my son. That thou oughtest to know and no man better, said the good man, for thou knewest the daughter of King Pelles fleshly, and on her thou begattest Galahad, and that was he that at the feast of Pentecost sat in the Siege Perilous...

Well, said Launcelot, meseemeth that good knight should pray for me unto the High Father, that I fall not to sin again. Trust thou well, said the good man, thou fairest mickle the better for his prayer; ...but each shall bear his own burden.30

Sir Galahad and Sir Launcelot... after, on a Monday, it befell that they arrived in the edge of a forest tofore a cross... and a knight armed all in white... and said: Galahad, ye have been long enough with your Father, come out of the ship, and start upon this horse, and go where adventures shall lead thee in quest of the Sangreal. Then he went to his father and kissed him sweetly, and said: Fair sweet Father, I wot not when I shall see you more till I see the body of Jesu Christ. I pray you, said Launcelot, pray ye to the High Father that He hold me in His service... Now, son Galahad, said Launcelot, syne we shall depart, and never see other, I pray to the High Father to conserve me and you both. Sir, said Galahad, no prayer availeth so much as yours.31

31 Ibid., II, 256.
One of the most charming facts about the actual vocal prayers said by the characters is their pointed brevity coupled with humble earnestness. The succinctness reminds one of the short prayers found in the Gospels, such as Martha’s, “Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick,” and the beggar’s, “Lord, that I may see.” There are at least seven of these short prayers given by a variety of persons. There is nothing of our modern stiff formality about them. Sir Bors, for instance, when torn between saving his brother or a damsel, prays:

Fair sweet Lord, Jesu Christ, whose liege man I am, keep Lionel, my brother, that these knights slay him not, and for pity of you, and for Mary’s sake, I shall succour this maid.32

Sir Launcelot is the author of a few poignant prayers also. He remembers to thank God for a feeling of peace and the greatest sweetness he had ever experienced: “Fair sweet Father, Jesu Christ, I wot not in what joy I am, for this joy passeth all earthly joys that ever I was in.”33 He also utters a humble prayer when, after trusting more in his own strength than in God’s, he is unarmed by one blow of a mere dwarf: “Fair Father Jesu Christ, I thank thee for Thy great mercy that Thou reprovest me of my misdeed; now see I well that Ye hold me for Thy servant.”34 And just

32 Ibid., II, 225.
33 Ibid., II, 254.
34 Ibid., II, 256.
before he enters into the chamber wherein he knows the Sangreal to be, Launcelot kneels down and gives voice to this prayer:

    Fair sweet Father, Jesu Christ, if ever I did thing that pleased Thee, Lord for thy pity never have me not in despite for my sins done aforetime, and that Thou show me something of that I seek.35

King Mordrains utters his nunc dimittis when Galahad, whom he has waited for years to see and embrace, at last holds him in love "on his pure virgin breast." He says, like Simeon of the Gospel, "Fair Lord Jesu Christ, now I have my will. Now I require thee, in this point that I am in, thou come and visit me."36 We have referred to Elaine's dying prayer to her Savior before:

    ...I beseech the High Father of Heaven to have mercy upon my soul, and upon mine innumerable pains that I suffered may be allegiance of part of my sins. For sweet Jesu, said the fair maiden, I take Thee to record, on Thee was I never great offender against Thy laws; but that I loved this noble knight, Sir Launcelot, out of measure, and of myself, good Lord, I might not withstand the fervent love wherefore I have my death.37

Again we turn to Launcelot and see him praying beside a dying knight who has begged him for succour. Launcelot looks into the East, praying secretly:

    Thou blessed Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I beseech thee of thy mercy, that my simple worship and honesty be saved, and thou blessed Trinity, thou mayest give power to

35 Ibid., II, 257.
36 Ibid., II, 261.
37 Ibid., II, 304.
heal this sick knight, by thy great virtue and grace of thee, but good Lord, never of myself. 38

This generous prayer in behalf of his comrade is answered, and "The wounds forthwithal fair healed."

Another form of prayer in which the characters fervently participate is the Divine Office. Attendance at this service bespeaks their desire to sing the praises of God even outside the time of Mass. The Mass, after all, is obligatory on Sundays and Holy Days; but attendance at Matins and Evensong (Vespers) is a pious practice of supererogation. The Divine Office is a compilation of certain prayers to be recited, or chanted, at fixed hours of the day or night by priests, religious, or clerics, and in general, by all those obliged by their vocation to fulfill this duty. 39 Now, most of the characters of the Morte are not priests, nor religious, but we find them present, nevertheless, at this magnificent liturgical function. "Matins and Mass" is a phrase used so often it seems to imply one continuous service. The lords and ladies and knights who come to seek a successor to King Uther attend "matins and first mass. " 40 And the tournaments, as we saw, on Assumption Day do not begin until all the knights had come from the "minster when Mass and matins were done. " 41

40 Malory, I, 10.
41 Ibid., I, 224.
It is when the King and Queen have returned from the service in the Church "at the hour of underne on Whitsunday" that they discover the mysterious words printed on the Siege Perilous concerning the Sangreal.42 Directly after Evensong the Holy Grail descends into the banquet hall.

And then the king and all estates went home unto Camelot, and so went to evensong to the great minster, and so after upon that to supper, and every knight sat in his own place as they were toforehand. Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder, that them thought the place should all to drive. In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other, by their seeming, fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked every man on other as they had been dumb. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bare it. And there was all the hall fulfilled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world. And when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, they the Holy Vessel saw departed suddenly, and they wist not where it became; then had they all breath to speak. And then the king yielded thankings to God, of His good grace that he had sent them.43

Later on, during the quest for this same Holy Grail, Sir Gawan

42 Ibid., II, 165.
43 Ibid., II, 171.
...rode till he came to an hermitage, and there found the good man saying his evensong of Our Lady; and there Sir Gawaine asked harbour for charity, and the good man granted it him gladly...And on the morn Sir Gawaine departed from the hermit and betaught him unto God.44

We might also mention in concluding this section on the Divine Office, that for the most part the time of day is indicated by naming a certain part of the Office. For example, Evensong or Vespers is a favorite time for launching forth in search of adventure.45 And Prime also designates the hour of departure for social and business journeys.46

44 Ibid., II, 185.
46 Ibid., II, 252.
CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE IN LE MORTE D'ARTHUR AS AN EXPRESSION OF CATHOLIC CULTURE.

The purpose of this thesis, as stated in the introduction, was to show forth the sacramental life of the characters in Le Morte D'Arthur as an expression of their Catholic culture. This we believe to have been done in the two foregoing chapters by sheer accumulation of fact. By ample illustration and an all but exhaustive citation of the more significant passages dealing with sacramentalism, these chapters strived to point out the numerous details which show the Morte to be an unconscious expression of Catholicity in action, or, as we have said, an expression of Catholic culture, sub specie sacramenti. So numerous and pell-mell have been the passages that the main outlines of the picture may be obscure. A brief resume will aid us. First, we see the characters leading lives which are begun, sustained, and end under the influence of the sacraments. Although their falls from grace are frequent and often serious, their faith strengthened by the sacraments, effect due repentance and purpose of amendment. The seven sacraments of Christ embrace their whole life; they sanctify all its heights and depths. The soul at peace with God.
is further sanctified by Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.
The soul heavy with sin is lightened by Baptism and Penance. The
afflicted soul, in the fearful hour of death, is strengthened by
Extreme Unction. Their community life is sanctified by the bless-
ings of the sacraments: on the social side by the sacrament of
Matrimony, on the religious side by the sacrament of Holy Orders.
The sacraments are a tangible reality, not a collection of empty
symbols; and, consequently, are an ever present and visible fact.
Growing out of the sacraments is the Mass, in which the characters
take part eagerly in their pursuit of holiness and salvation. The
Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a tremendously real experience.
Space and time are abolished and they stand before the awful real-
ity of Calvary. Here a stream of sorrow and repentance, of love
and gratitude, of generosity and a spirit of sacrifice, flow out
from the Heart on the altar and pass into the hearts of the pray-
ing congregation. With the love of God thus in their hearts, they
go forth into the world to partake in the quest of the Sangreal.
They go forth and live upon this sacramental principle: to make
use of every opportunity the Church offers in order to make more
sure of their ultimate salvation, to love and worship God and
thereby draw forth from Him into their every action of life a
reward of grace, love, and truth.

The main point, among the many possible, which we wished to
bring out, and the one which is the more difficult to understand,
is that the characters of the Morte are fundamentally religious minded people. Everything they do is colored by their religious beliefs. They are not merely pietistic; they are religious. It is easy to understand how in the times of peace of soul this religious note could be dominant, permeating their lives. But what is the paramount fact is that in periods of storm and stress the mind of every knight turns beseechingly, as though drawn by a magnet, to its forgiving and merciful friend, Christ. We see all sorts of souls in various grades of holiness turning to Christ in their need. Sir Galahad lives in grace always and never knows a fall. Sir Bors and Sir Percivale are close behind him, but loyal men of Christ though they are, they succumb to the lures of many minor temptations. We see both of them during their quest of the Holy Grail going frequently to confession, and receiving strength to struggle anew. King Arthur, too, is a very "human" personage. Born of an illicit union, he begets a child by his own sister, the future Sir Modred who later causes Arthur's death and downfall. But we see, too, how this same Arthur is a frequent participant in the Mass, one who confesses regularly, sees to the spiritual needs of his knights of the Round Table, and who, at the end, dies a holy death. Sir Launcelot, however, is the best example of what we mean by rising again from sin. Throughout the romance, he is in constant struggle with himself over his "hot love" for Queen Guinever. But even this love has not deterred him from begetting Galahad from another of his loves. Even after
his almost mystical experience with the Holy Grail, he returns
to Camelot and falls into sin with Guinever. Indeed, it is a long
time before Launcelot and Guinever ever renounce one another; but
when they do they do so irrevocably: she becomes a nun, he a priest.

This episode relating the repentance of Launcelot and Guinever
is but one example of how the grace of Christ finally tri-
umphs in the Morte. The last few pages find many of the characters,
practically the whole of the Table Round, dying and being buried
in the bosom of Christ. Those who die thus reconciled to Christ,
be their terrible sins what they may, die supremely happy and
holy deaths. When we remember that it is the grace of Christ
with which they have fortified themselves during life that finally
guides them to His bosom, we realize how powerful a force is de-
scribed from their sacramental life. The knights are passionate,
fierce, sinful, for they have the excessive faults of a full-
blooded, masterful race. But they are fiercely passionate, too,
in their devotion to Christ, repentance follows quickly upon sin,
and always there is surrounding them the splendid aura of the
supernatural. They live life up to the hilt; and their life is
one of Catholicity, Catholic culture.
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