

State super vias, et videte, et interrogate de viis
antiquis que sit bona, et ambulate in ea *

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In Jeremiah 6:16, quoted by the Parson at the beginning of his tale, the good way the children of Israel are to take is not specifically described. Rather, it is opposed to apostasy and idolatry. In the *Parson's Tale*, however, this way is identified as penance, and the tale itself becomes an elaborate treatise on the sacrament of penance. Thus, the *Parson's Tale* provides orthodox closure to a pilgrimage that has often lost sight of its geographic and spiritual destinies, the shrine of St. Thomas in Canterbury and the Heavenly Jerusalem. There had been "muchel of wandrynge by the weye," of which not only the Wife of Bath but many another pilgrim was guilty (Chaucer, GP I.467). The goal of the pilgrimage became shrouded. The pilgrims in Chaucer's *CT* lost their way much like Dante, who in Canto I of the *Inferno* confessed to be lost in the dark wood.

"La diritta via era smarrita" [the right road was wholly lost and gone] could serve as the motto for an experience frequently encountered in medieval literature: the loss of direction (Dante, Canto I.3). This feeling characterizes many protagonists on secular as well as spiritual quests or a combination thereof, who lose their way in either physical or spiritual landscapes. Both terrains are difficult to distinguish from one another in view of the symbolic or allegorical significance of the natural markers that should enable the questers to make appropriate choices.

A case in point is the *Queste del Saint Graal* of the Vulgate Cycle (ca. 1225-1230), a true *locus desperatus* when it comes to choosing the right

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way. Spiritual disposition, grace, election, and sometimes fortune seem to account for choices that to the ordinary reader appear to be totally out of the questers' control, a situation that necessitates explanations by clerical figures of authority, almost always given retrospectively rather than prospectively. The road taken, although the right one judged by human logic, often turns out to be the road to perdition, whereas the road not taken, appearing to be the wrong one, sometimes turns out to be the road to salvation. Yet, how is the quester to know this? The opaqueness of the situation, exacerbated by the two discursive modes informing the *Queste*, that of Arthurian romance and that of an exegetical clerical tradition, raises a host of semi-otic and epistemological questions that touch on the allegorical or non-allegorical nature of signs, human perception, free choice, and predestination. The paper will try to shed some light on these conditions and processes in the *Queste del Saint Graal* and occasionally in Malory's adaptation, *The Tale of the Sankgreal*, in the *Morte Darthur*, a work that will be referred to at critical moments of the subsequent discussion of the *Queste*.

There will be three areas of investigation: 1. The perimeters defining the *Queste*; 2. The element of choice and the prerequisites for making the right choice; 3. A case study of three knights, Melyant, Gawain, and Bors, confronted during their quest with having to make such a choice.

1. The perimeters defining the *Queste*

The perimeters set in the *Queste*, are, on the one hand, Arthur's mundane city of Camelot and Galahad's mystical city of Sarras, between which not only the elusive and enigmatic Grail but also the knightly individuals move, who have to make a choice of the paths before them. From the beginning of the quest, initiated by Gawain, there is a general movement from Arthur's court or the City of Man to the two places of the Grail (Corbenic and Sarras) and beyond them the Heavenly Jerusalem or the City of God, to express this trajectory in

Augustinian terms (Frese 14). So, basically the road not taken is the one that will lead to these two destinations, Corbenic and Sarras, because of the 150 knights setting out in quest of the adventures of the Holy Grail only three are successful. The perimeters, Camelot and Corbenic/Sarras, roughly correspond to the concepts of terrestrial and celestial knighthood so dominant in the *Queste*, of which there is only an echo in Malory. As it turns out, only Galahad, Perceval, and Bors will achieve the final goal, thus qualifying as heavenly knights, whereas all others are earthly knights, who are flawed to differing degrees. Their search will fall either short or far short of the spiritual goal, defined as both the adventures of the Holy Grail and its attainment. While Lancelot's search comes to a grinding halt in Corbenic castle, yet is rewarded with a glimpse of the holy object, his brother Hector only reaches the gate of Corbenic, where he is barred from entering it, and Gawain, the most reprobate of Arthur's knights, does not even get close to Corbenic. Once the quest gets underway, Arthur's court disappears from view almost to the very end, when Lancelot returns to it as a humbled hero. Instead of accompanying the Grail to Sarras, as do Galahad, Perceval, and Bors, Lancelot has to return to his old environment and, as it turns out, to his old sinful life (*Mort Artu* 3.1-10; Malory 2: 1045.10-12).

2. The element of choice and the prerequisites for making the right choice

It has long been recognized that the *Queste* shows influences of monastic Cistercian spirituality. Although being first and foremost a book of romance, in which quest and adventure play a central role, the *Queste* is also a spiritual search for a goal that lies beyond the confines of chivalric romance.¹ As Albert Pauphilet says, Cistercian theology comprises the background of the *Queste* (Pauphilet 53-84). More specifically, the work can be read in the light of Bernardian spirituality, especially his ideas on asceticism, monasticism, and mysticism. Needless to say there is an extensive literature covering

these subjects, whose findings will not be repeated here.² Rather, the focus will be on choice and the prerequisites for making the right one. The first touches on the act of choosing itself. The second concerns the moral state of the quester.

In his treatise *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (prior to 1128) Bernard asserts the freedom of choice. For Bernard (unlike Augustine) freedom of will from any necessity belongs to God and all rational creatures, whether angelic or human (*De gratia* IV.9). Will is free, even though the consent of the will to do good has to be directed that way by grace (*De gratia* IV.9). It is free because it is voluntary. God's grace does not compel. It merely makes plain to reason how the will ought to respond. So, when the will wills evil, it is responsible for its own act—no operation of grace is involved (*De gratia* VI.17). Choice is an act of judgment. It is judgement's task to distinguish between what is lawful and what is expedient or unlawful. Counsel will help to examine these matters.

Judgement is a matter of reason. In the sinner the faculty of reason cannot work properly. It is blind, because it cannot visualize the situation in which it finds itself. It is too ill to function properly. Bernard takes for granted Augustine's view that sin has the effect of clouding the mind and making it impossible to think straight. Because of sin the whole soul consisting of reason, memory, and will is confused. Yet not only reason and thus reasoning is affected by sin, which impairs this faculty, but also memory and will (*Ad clericos* VI.11). Will, however, makes a human being blameworthy or not (*De gratia* II.5).

One of the things reasoning can do is prove and disprove, that is giving some degree of certainty (proving) or taking it away (disproving). The result of the latter process is called opinion, which rests on what appears to be true but may upon the introduction of more evidence turn out to be false. Opinion is thus provisional, although often taken as certainty by those whose reasoning is limited (*De consideratione* V.iii.6). Faith in contrast has a security, which cannot in the end depend on reasoning, for it rests on authority, that is, Christ (*De consideratione* V.iii.6).

In the *Queste* the successful celestial knights are guided by faith, whereas the unsuccessful terrestrial ones are guided by opinion. Their sinful state prevents them from achieving certainty and thus from making the right decisions.

The moral state of the questers is affected most profoundly by penance, chastity, and love, subjects St. Bernard dwells on in numerous of his sermons and treatises that appear to have influenced the author(s) of the *Queste*. Among these moral principles upheld in the *Queste*, penance is of primary importance. The sacrament of penance is often discussed in Bernard's writings.³ He thus adumbrates developments that culminate in the injunction to do penance at least once a year issued by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, that is, about ten to fifteen years prior to the assumed date of composition of the *Queste*.

Penance is the necessary prerequisite for any knight setting out on the search for the Holy Grail and the discovery of its mysteries. Penance, however, has to be accompanied by chastity, a virtue also championed by St. Bernard. To be chaste in this life is to anticipate a condition of the heavenly life. Chastity represents the condition of immortal glory in this time and place (*De moribus* 12-15). The frail vessel of our body carries chastity precariously, like a precious ointment (*De moribus* 17-19). So Bernard links chastity with incorruptibility (Evans 31).

To be efficacious, however, chastity has to be grounded in humility and love. Chastity without charity is without value: "Tolle caritatem, castitas non placet" (*De moribus* 7). *Caritas*, although an ever present concept in Bernard's writings, is treated at length in two treatises: *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* (c. 1124) and *De diligendo Deo* (c. 1125). *Caritas* is love that centers on Christ. As such it is selfless, that is, free of any self-serving or self-gratifying purpose. It is not owed to anyone or any institution, but it comes from within, being generated by a sense of inner necessity to love God. Charity is a process that demands constant reevaluation of one's being. It ultimately leads to a separation from the self, i.e., the sinful self, and to a complete change of one's personality in the image of true altruistic love unconstrained

by outside necessity. In the *Queste* Bors submits to this process of change.

To what extent is the choice made a conscious one? The questers, it seems, are propelled forward by accident or chance, both positive and negative. Positive, when an adventure turns out well such as Perceval crossing himself and thus ending the temptation engineered by the devil in the form of an attack on his chastity. Negative, when Gawain mistakenly kills Yvain, a fellow knight of the Round Table. *Aventure* turns into *mesaventure*. There is no or little process of deliberation. The knights enter upon a path they seem to be destined for, yet every path is the logical consequence of spiritual disposition aided by grace—in Perceval's case his trust in God, and in Gawain's case his refusal to repent and leave his sinful ways.

The very concept of adventure as something happening to a knightly individual in certain circumstances taken over from Arthurian romance seems to limit choice. The influence of divine agents in the *Queste* appears to restrict choice even more. Heavenly voices will tell the knights where to go and what to do. There is a great emphasis on God's will and His arrangement of a general plan. Although dominated by the principle of election, there is still individual moral choice. Even the infallible Galahad is granted free choice, though his moral perfection prevents him from making false choices.⁴ There are only moral choices in the universe of the *Queste*, that is, every decision entails a right or a wrong path.

3. A case study of three knights: Melyant, Gawain, and Bors

The final portion of the article is dedicated to three case studies: First, a choice of crossroads by an untried young knight that depends on the understanding or interpretation of a written text: the Melyant episode. Second, a fundamental choice of two moral paths by a mature knight: Gawain (wrong path). Third, a fundamental choice of two moral paths by a mature knight: Bors (right path).

3.1. A choice of crossroads by an untried young knight that depends on the understanding or interpretation of a written text: Melyant

Although knighted by Galahad, the perfect knight and soldier of Christ, the young Melyant chooses the wrong way when he arrives at the crossroads. An inscription prohibits the taking of the left fork to those who are not worthy (*preudome*) of this road. There are no moral injunctions attached to the right path—still death (most likely spiritual death) may await those who embark on it (*Queste* 3-8). Despite Galahad's warning Melyant, motivated by pride in his own prowess, takes the left fork and is now confronted with the sins of pride and covetousness in the form of a golden crown. By picking up the golden crown, he succumbs to these sins. Another knight, who is then defeated by Galahad, instantly overcomes him in battle.

The significance of Melyant's choice and subsequent adventure with the knight is explained by an authority figure, a monk, by means of moral exegesis, according to which the path of the righteous and that of the sinners are juxtaposed. The untried Melyant, cleanly shriven before setting out on the Grail quest, became the target of the Devil. The knight who struck Melyant down was a sinful knight, the tool of the Devil, who was prevented from killing Melyant by the sign of the cross he had made before entering battle. Galahad easily overcame this evil knight. Melyant's major error was to mistake the meaning of the inscription. According to the monk, it referred to celestial knighthood, which Melyant interpreted to mean secular knighthood. In other words, Melyant is accused of an error in judgment: he approached the sign with a literal mind set, whereas the correct interpretation of the text demanded a spiritual reading since his adventure was no ordinary one but an adventure of the Holy Grail. Yet how was he to know this? The markers are not clear, offering no easy or safe choice to an overly confident young man. He should have been cautioned by Galahad's warning, however, after witnessing how Galahad just exorcized the Devil in the graveyard and thus demonstrated his special state of grace and the spiritual nature of

adventure. Also, the very fact that right is generally preferable to left could have guided Melyant in making the right decision. We do not know, though, what would have happened to him, had he taken the right fork and whether this way was at all available to him. He could also have stayed in place and waited for divine guidance like Perceval and Lancelot. To take no road at all is a viable alternative in the *Queste*, even though this sort of conduct is radically at odds with knightly behavior in romance literature, where knights engaging in quests and adventures are constantly confronted with choices.

In Malory, the situation is less clear. First of all, the inscription on the Cross contains two moral injunctions that appear to be similar: the left way is associated with adventure and prowess, whereas the right way promises success only to those who are good men and worthy knights (Malory 2: 883.24-30). Since Malory substantially reduces the exegetical passages of his French source, the monk's interpretation is also truncated. In Malory, Melyas becomes the Devil's target because he has embarked on the Grail quest without making confession (not in the *Queste*). The left path is that of sinners and unbelievers, whereas the right path is the way of the righteous to Jesus Christ—there is no mention of terrestrial (left path) and celestial (right path) knighthood. The fact that Melyas's adventure is an adventure of the Holy Grail receives even less attention in Malory. When Galahad knights Melyas, he admonishes him to be "a myrroure unto all chevalry," and winning prowess (characteristic of the left path) pertains to this (Malory 2: 883.9). In the *Queste*, on the other hand, success is a matter of worthiness and Melyant, a chivalric neophyte, may not yet be worthy—at least he has not yet proved his moral excellence, the yard-stick by which failure and success are measured in the *Queste*.

In the Melyant episode the protagonist obviously follows the wrong path that would have resulted in his physical and spiritual ruin had it not been for the sign of the cross that saved him from destruction. The path not taken is the one to the kingdom of Heaven or, in terms of the *Queste*, the one that accomplishes the adventures of the Holy Grail and thus leads to its spiritual experience. Barring Galahad's previous

adventure of the tomb, allegorized by the old monk in a christological manner as establishing Galahad as a type of Christ, Melyant's adventure at the crossroads is the first one by an ordinary knight to receive a moral interpretation by a figure of authority. Thus, the Melyant episode underscores both the spiritual nature of the Grail adventures and the distinction between the holy knight Galahad and the rest of the questers: success on the one hand, and failure on the other.⁵ It prepares the reader/listener for the special mode of narration that takes place simultaneously on two levels and cautions him to look for the spiritual significance of the conventional romance adventures hidden under the literal surface, something Melyant was unable to do.

3.2. A fundamental choice of two moral paths by a mature knight: Gawain (wrong path)

The right path to be taken in the *Queste* is obviously the one that makes of Arthur's terrestrial knights God's celestial ones. Confession at the outset of the quest is the necessary prerequisite for successful adventures of the Holy Grail and the vision or attainment of the Grail itself. Confession should be followed by contrition, which means the penitent should feel sorry for his sinful life because he has offended God. The final step is satisfaction consisting of reparation and amendment. The sacrament of penance that Chaucer's Parson had made the starting point of his tale, a treatise on penance, and that Dante subjected himself to on his ascent of Mount Purgatory, also dominates the *Queste*. When Gawain initiates the quest after the appearance of the veiled Grail in King Arthur's court, he embarks on an "adventure" that is radically different from ordinary knightly adventures. He vows not to return to the court "devant que je l'aie veu plus apertement" (*Queste* 16.22) [until I have seen the Grail more clearly]. The key word is "apertement" [clearly or openly], that is, Gawain and the Arthurian knights joining in his vow want to see the Grail, not realizing that the adventures of the Holy Grail leading to its

attainment are not feats of chivalric prowess but tests of the moral condition of the questers. Arthur appears to be the only one who is aware of the dangers facing his knights and thus his court. He expects great harm for the Round Table—and sadly his predictions turn out to be true, since 36 knights will perish in the quest, half of them killed by Gawain.⁶ To underscore the uniqueness of the endeavor, a messenger sent by the hermit Nascien admonishes the knights not to undertake it if not properly confessed and shriven and resolved to stay pure while undertaking it.

Car ceste Queste n'est mie queste de terriennes choses, ainz doit estre li encerchemenz des grans secrez et des privetez Nostre Seignor et des grans repostailles que li Hauz Mestres mostera apertement au boneuré chevalier qu'il a esleu a son serjant entre les autres chevaliers terriens, a qui il mostrera les granz merveilles dou Saint Graal [...]. (*Queste* 19.19-25)

[This is not a quest for earthly goods. Rather, it should be understood as the search for the great secrets of Our Lord and the great mysteries that the Almighty will reveal openly to the special knight he has chosen from among all others to be his servant. The Lord will show this knight the great wonders of the Holy Grail (...).]

The messenger's words leave no doubt: the quest is not for worldly things and will be accomplished fully, that is, culminating in a mystical translation by only one individual, whose unique status has been signaled by a number of signs (perilous seat, drawing of the sword). Gawain, however, does not seem to be discouraged by these restrictions. Like the rest of Arthur's 150 knights he vows to undertake the quest, even though he has violated the major premise: confession, as will become apparent later on, when he admits to the hermit to not having been confessed for four full years (*Queste* 54.9). He is not the only one who has left without confession. The hermit interpreting Gawain's dream of the 150 bulls declares that most of the knights setting out on the Grail quest were not confessed and thus not ready for it. In spite of being Arthur's nephew, and after Lancelot the most distinguished knight, Gawain like so many of his fellow knights is off to a wrong start. He embarks on an adventure that not only is not for him but also one for which he is insufficiently prepared. The path not

taken is the path through confession, contrition, and satisfaction to spiritual perfection. Instead he embarks on a path he is ill prepared for. And thus his grail quest turns out to be a disaster. He does not encounter any adventures relating to the Holy Grail—the lack of adventure so frequently deplored by Gawain and knights of his ilk being the sign of their spiritual imperfection. He also fails to catch up with Galahad, who during the quest becomes something of a loadstar: all questers try to join him, yet only the two pure knights, Perceval and Bors, are successful. Gawain's attempt fails, a failure that elicits the following comment from a monk:

Certes, sire, la compaignie de vos deus ne seroit mie covenable. Car vos estes serjanz mauvés et desloiax, et il est chevaliers tiex come il doit estre. (*Queste* 52.2-4)

[In truth, however, you and Galahad would not keep good company. For you are a failed and disloyal soldier while he is a proper knight.]

Gawain also kills his adversaries, friends and foes, more indiscriminately than any other knight. To Hector he admits to having killed more than ten knights, thus fulfilling Arthur's prophecy that Gawain will usher in the end of the Round Table—in the *Mort Artu* he regrets having killed 18 knights. Little wonder that he is twice upbraided by figures of moral authority. First he is called a "serjanz mauvés et desloiax" [failed and disloyal soldier], an accusation that Gawain does not refute (*Queste* 52.3-4). Thereafter he is called a "serjanz a l'anemi" [soldier of the devil] when he admits his failure to go to confession for four years (*Queste* 54.18). Because of his moral depravity he has killed the seven brothers Galahad, the "serjant Jhesucrist" [soldier of Christ], had fought but spared (*Queste* 29.20 and 36.17). Still, there is hope for him: "Gauvain, Gauvain, se tu vouloies lessier ceste mauvese vie que tu as ja si longuement maintenue, encore te porroies tu acorder a Nostre Seignor" (*Queste* 55.17-19) [Gawain, Gawain, if you want to leave behind this impure life that you have lived so long, you can still make amends with Our Lord]. Although admonished to repent for his sins, he declines: "Et il dist que de penitance fere ne porroit il la peine soffrir" (*Queste* 55.23-24) [Gawain replied that he could not bear the

burden of doing penance]. Gawain's refusal to do penance becomes the turning point in his quest. He has been shown the right way and has rejected it because the way seems too difficult. His is a conscious moral or more precisely immoral choice that illustrates once again that the characters in the *Queste* are not predestined but free to choose.

When we meet Gawain again, he has just joined Hector, another failed quester. Both complain about the absence of adventure. Each of them has a strange vision, Gawain of the 150 bulls and Hector of himself and Lancelot riding on high horses. Lancelot is thrown off his horse (of pride), whereas Hector coming to a rich man's house is barred from the banquet. A voice calls out:

Chevalier plein de povre foi et de male creance, ces trois choses que vos avez orendroit veues vos failent; et por ce ne poez vos avenir as aventures dou Saint Graal. (*Queste* 151.5-6)

[Knights of little faith and meager trust, you lack the three things you have seen here, and that is why you cannot participate in the adventures of the Holy Grail.]

They move on and meet Yvain, a fellow knight of the Round Table. Yvain is inadvertently killed by Gawain, who calls this tragic feat a "grant mesaventure" (*Queste* 153.21) [great mishap]. Both Hector and Gawain consider themselves victims of "droit meschaance" (*Queste* 154.22) [pure ill luck] and continue on their way until they meet a hermit, who explains their visions. They lack three things: charity, abstinence, and truth. For this reason they are barred from undertaking the adventures of the Holy Grail:

Les aventures qui ore avienent sont les senefiances et les demonstrances dou Saint Graal, ne li signe dou Saint Graal n'aparront ja a pecheor ne a home envelopé de pechié. Dont il ne vos aparront ja; car vos estes trop desloial pecheor. (*Queste* 160.33 – 161.1-3)

[The adventures taking place now are the signs and the showings of the Holy Grail; the signs of the Holy Grail will never appear to sinners or to anyone surrounded by sin.]

As the hermit makes clear, for both Hector and Gawain the quest has come to an end. Gawain, however, is admonished one last time to

return to the Lord. He refuses and thus proves himself to be a hardened sinner. He perseveres in his sinfulness and follows the path to damnation he set out on when he started the quest without confession. Despite all the warnings he remains obstinate and unrepentant, which distinguishes him from Lancelot, the repentant sinner, who is granted a glimpse of the mysteries of the Holy Grail, even though he is precluded from the ultimate experience of the sacrosanct.

Although Malory abridges Gawain's role, he does not change its substance. The Gawain portrait in Malory corresponds by and large to that of the *Queste*. He is equally unconfessed and unrepentant. If there is any change at all, it is one for the worse because unlike the Gawain in the *Queste* the Gawain in Malory is also called "a grete murtherar" (*Malory 2: 948.19*).⁷ Gawain refuses to confess, even though he has professed his willingness to do so. He is unfavorably compared to Lancelot, who, though sinful, never killed nor will kill anyone on his quest. The contrast between the two knights is worked out in greater detail in Malory than in the *Queste*. Lancelot may be a sinner and unstable, as the hermit says: "And yett shall he dye ryght an hooly man, and no doute he hath no felow of none erthly synfull man ly-vyng" (*Malory 2: 948.27-29*). This prediction of Lancelot's sainted future, not included in the *Queste*, reconfirms Gawain's own assessment of Lancelot's exalted station among his peers made at the beginning of the Gawain section. Together with Galahad, Perceval, and Bors he is named as one of the four knights most likely to find the Grail (*Malory 2: 941.19-25*). Although Lancelot is not admitted to the Holy Grail, by becoming a hermit and dedicating his life to God after the destruction of the Arthurian world, he ultimately takes the path that leads him to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the proper destiny of all the Grail knights in the *Queste*.

3.3. A fundamental choice of two moral paths by a mature knight: Bors (right path)

After the Gawain episode the story turns to Bors, whose adventures and visions are recounted and allegorized. Before Bors takes up the Grail quest, he is first instructed on the importance of confession and then dressed in white as a sign of penance. Thereafter he receives confession and Holy Communion, that is, he is properly prepared for the adventures of the Holy Grail. First, he encounters a bird that revives his young with its blood and dies. Guided by chance, he arrives at a fortress, where he fights on behalf of a young lady disinherited by her elder sister, the wife of the deceased King Amant, against the elder sister's champion, Priadan the Black, and defeats him. In the night before the battle Bors has a series of strange visions: one is about two birds, a black one resembling a crow, and a white one looking like a swan, both of which try to enlist his aid. The other is about a worm-eaten tree trunk that can hardly stand on its own. To its right are two lilies of the valley, one of which tries to deprive the other of its whiteness. They are separated by a wise man. Shortly thereafter a tree bearing fruit in abundance issues from each flower. The wise man addresses Bors and says: "Boorz, ne seroit il fox, qui ces flors lairoit perir por cest fust porri secorre qu'il ne chaïst a terre?" (*Queste* 171.25-26) [Wouldn't a man be foolish to let these flowers perish in order to prevent this rotten tree from falling?].

The day thereafter an "aventure merveilleuse" (*Queste* 175.5) [marvellous adventure] befalls him, that in retrospect turns out to be the central episode of the Bors section: at a crossroads Bors meets two knights who are leading his brother Lionel away. His hands are tied across his chest and he is badly beaten with sharp thorns. As Bors is about to come to his rescue, he glances into the other direction and becomes aware of a young maiden being forcibly carried into a dense forest by an armed knight. The maiden prays to Mary for help and upon seeing Bors, implores him, by the faith he owes to his Lord God,

to prevent her from being taken by force and raped. He commits his brother to God's protection and sets out to rescue the maiden.

The story continues when Bors finds a bloodied corpse that looks like the body of his brother Lionel. He takes it to what appears to be a chapel, where a man professing to be a priest upbraids Bors for not aiding his brother:

Or resgarde ou il a greignor damage, ou en ce que ele fust despucelee, ou en ce que tes freres, qui est un des bons chevaliers dou monde, fust ocis. Certes mielz fust que toutes les puceles dou monde fussent despucelees que il fust ocis. (*Queste* 179.26-29)

[Consider where the most damage was done: in the rape of the maiden or the death of your brother, one of the greatest knights. It would indeed be better for all the maidens in the world to be raped than for your brother to be killed.]

Yet, there seems to be a chance of rehabilitation: Bors can still save his cousin Lancelot from immanent danger, if he does what is asked of him. He is led to a room, where his chastity is sorely tempted by a beautiful maiden, who threatens to kill herself and her companions, should he persist in refusing her. He does and crosses himself, whereupon the temptress and her minions are turned into devils. Before leaving this infernal place, Bors looks for the body of his brother. When he cannot find it, he assumes that Lionel is not dead and that he has witnessed a "fantosme" [phantom] (*Queste* 182.18). At an abbey of White Monks, the abbot explains Bors's adventures, especially the significance of his many visions and dreams.

In some instances the allegory is easy to unveil such as the bird reviving its young (a pelican) being a figure of Christ; in other instances, the process is more complicated because the crow, the black bird, stands for Holy Church, whereas the swan, the white bird, signifies the Devil. The colors seem to point in opposite moral directions. It requires some knowledge of the Bible, the Bestiaries or the *claves*, available to the members of the clergy, to decipher the correct meaning of the images. The interpretation of Bors's dreams continues: the worm-eaten tree betokens his brother Lionel, who possesses no vir-

tues, only an abundance of mortal sins. Still, his brother was saved by Christ to whom Bors had entrusted him. The two lilies of the valley are the two virgins (the male attacker and the female victim) Bors saved from losing their virginity when he came to the rescue of the damsel in distress.⁸

To cut a long story short, after leaving the abbey Bors meets Lionel again, who threatens to kill him for not helping him. He is prevented from committing the heinous crime of fratricide by first an old man and then Calogrenant, a fellow knight of the Round Table. In his rage Lionel kills both and would have pursued Bors, if God had not intervened and separated the two brothers. Bors is sent to the seashore, where he meets Perceval. Both Grail knights abandon their active quest and commit themselves to divine guidance:

Einsi sont li dui ami ensemble si come Nostre Sires lor avoit apareillié. Si atentent ilec les aventures que Nostre Sires lor voudra envoyer; si s'en vont tot contreval la mer une heure arriere et une autre avant, si comme li venez les meine. (*Queste* 195.9-14)

[The two friends were thus reunited according to Our Lord's plan for them. As they awaited the adventures that Our Lord might wish to send them, they drifted on the sea, now here, now there, wherever the wind might carry them.]

This is a brief digest of Bors's adventures that center on his moral dilemma at the crossroads. The alternatives of either sacrificing his brother or the maiden are equally undesirable not only by thirteenth century secular standards, according to which blood relationship overrides any other loyalties and the succor of a damsel in distress is the first and foremost duty of any honorable knight. Arthur's knights are sworn brothers but they are also sworn to come to the rescue of maidens—never mind the non-literary reality. Both aspects receive special attention in Malory, who stresses these obligations to a far greater degree than the author(s) of the *Queste*.⁹ When Bors decides to help the maiden, he seems to place the code of chivalry above family loyalty. There is more to it, though. By the time Bors faces the dilemma, the reader knows of the paramount importance of virginity in the

Queste. He has already learned from the Hermit interpreting Gawain's dream of the 150 bulls, all of which but three are spotted. Only Galahad possesses "virginité," being pure in body and soul, whereas Perceval possesses "pucelage" [maidenhood] and Bors purity of mind. While Galahad and Perceval are perfect virgins, Bors has slipped once, when he was tricked into intercourse. This experience, however, did strengthen his chastity. Virginité (*virginité* and *pucelage*) and chastity are the foremost virtues in the *Queste*, and thus it is not surprising that in protecting the maiden from rape, Bors appears to have made the right decision within the moral universe of the *Queste*. The maiden, at least, is happy with Bors's choice, who declares that 500 men would have died, had the abductor succeeded in raping her—but then the maiden is no disinterested party. That he has made the right choice is confirmed by the abbot who interprets his adventures: in taking pity on the maiden and helping her he has placed the love of Jesus above natural love, the love of his brother. The emphasis on charity may be a Bernardian touch.

For Bors the decision is complicated by the opacity of the signs and visions he has encountered during his adventures and seen in his dreams. Whereas some scenes and signs can be deciphered, like the dubious nature of the chapel without "eve beneoite ne croiz ne nule veraie enseigne de Jhesucrist" (*Queste* 178.30-31) [holy water, or cross or any sign of Jesus Christ] (absent in Malory), where the Devil appears to Bors in the guise of a holy man, others cannot: the quarrel between the two sisters, for example, is a common episode in Arthurian romance reminiscent of Chrétien's *Yvain*. Its allegorical significance as a battle between the Old and the New Law is revealed only after the crossroads scene. In view of this general uncertainty about the meaning of signs, there is only one lesson he could have learned from his past experiences: appearances are deceptive, the Devil is always lying in wait, and only unwavering trust in God will lead to success.

Unlike the Bors in Malory, the Bors of the *Queste* does not know that he will achieve the Holy Grail—only the reader/listener knows this,

who has read/heard the prediction made by Perceval's aunt long before Bors has to undergo these tests in the *Queste*. He may get some indication of his moral excellence, but there is no certainty of his election as in Malory, where the hermit in the beginning assures him:

"I pray the that thou ete none other tyll that thou sitte at the table where the Sankgreal shall be" [...] "But how know ye that I shall sytte there?" "Yes," seyde the good man, "that know I well, but there shall be but fewe of youre felowis with you." (Malory 2: 955.21-27)

With this assurance in mind, the upcoming adventures are less perilous because ultimate success is assured. Consequently, Malory can reduce the visions and dreams and with it the allegorical apparatus, even though he retains the central episode of Bors's dilemma. The hermit's explanation of Bors's choice as between the love of family and the love of God, however, is omitted, an explanation that in the *Queste* links the episode with Bernardian thought.

To sum up, the roads not taken in the *Queste* are of two kinds: they either lead to success or to failure, with success being equivalent to salvation and failure to sinfulness and possibly damnation. The choice between these two alternatives, although a conscious one, must often be made long before the actual decision takes place. In the moral universe of the *Queste* disposition aided by grace is of paramount importance. Those who are positively disposed, but found wanting like Melyant, who has not yet learned to distinguish between terrestrial and celestial knighthood, will take the wrong path and fail initially. Although severely wounded by an emissary of the Devil, he will survive, however, through the good offices of the saintly Galahad. Those who are disposed towards evil like Gawain will always take the wrong path and fail, the failure being a moral one that launches the individual on the road to perdition. Finally, those who are positively disposed and found stable in critical situations like Bors will take the right path and be saved. Since most of Arthur's knights share in Gawain's nature, the Round Table is ultimately doomed, as the hermit, explaining Gawain's and Hector's dreams, predicts (*Queste*

157.6-20). This includes Arthur himself, who in the subsequent *Mort Artu* dies in the final battle. There is no suggestion or hope of his return.¹⁰ The following inscription marks his splendid tomb: "CI GIST LI ROIS ARTUS QUI PAR SA VALEUR MIST EN SA SUBJECTION .XII. ROIAUMES" (*Mort Artu* 251.23-24) [Here lies King Arthur who through his valor conquered twelve kingdoms], stressing his earthly conquests rather than the mythic nature of his person and his court. Like the road that most of his knights took, Arthur's road led only to earthly, not heavenly fame. Earthly fame, however, is temporary and perishable.

The presence of figures of moral authority (priests, hermits, good men [*preudon*], and monks) in the *Queste* provides a running commentary on the significance of the signs, visions, dreams, and adventures. Whereas the protagonists only profit from their advice after they have made their choices, the chivalric audience accumulating knowledge while the quest progresses will ultimately know the difference between appearance and reality and the true nature of the signs and visions.

Since Malory has deleted most of the explanations, his knights and an audience probably consisting of the lower ranks of the gentry and wealthy members of the bourgeoisie move in a more opaque moral universe, a universe in which the adventures of the Holy Grail and the adventures of the Round Table are correlated to a degree missing from the *Queste*, where the learned discourse appears to call into question and challenge the discourse of Arthurian romance. The division between sinners and saints is less radical because Malory does not attempt to invalidate or replace terrestrial by celestial knighthood (Mahoney 391). Lancelot, once the "beste knyght of the worlde" [italics mine], is a case in point (Malory 2: 893.7). After initial failure he ultimately embarks on the right road and achieves sainthood, as did his son Galahad, "the holy knyght," who has always taken the right path (Malory 2: 886.26). Yet not only Lancelot is saved, there is also hope for Arthur. Although Malory equivocates when it comes to answering the question about Arthur's destiny after the final

battle, he does quote the opinion of many men who maintain that the inscription on his tomb reads: "HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS" (Malory 3: 1242.29). He thus prepares the way for Arthur's return, elevating the king and his court to mythic proportions and thereby justifying the way of terrestrial chivalry, whose imagined, constantly updated and revised values will take on Utopian qualities in some nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arthurian fiction.

Eberhard Karls Universität
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NOTES

¹For a discussion of the various discourses comprising the composition of the *Queste* with an emphasis on romance see Burns, chapter 3, "Fictions of Meaning and Interpretation," 55-77, and chapter 4, "Fictions of Representation," 79-150; Freeman-Regalado 91-113; and Micha 153-54.

²Chief among these are Gilson 321-47; Matarasso, especially the chapter "Quest for an Author," 205-41; Baumgartner; Bogdanow 23-46; and Pratt 69-96.

³Winkler 66-67 provides a list of works in which Bernard discusses penance.

⁴As Anne Marie d'Arcy aptly formulates: "The Good Knight passes unscathed through the metaphysical *Wunderkammer* of signs and initiatory rites which constitute the grail quest" (69).

⁵It should be stressed that Galahad, although conceived as a type of Christ, is not a savior figure because in the end he only saves himself. Salvation in the *Queste* is individual, not collective and depends on making correct moral choices. Cf. Huber 218-19.

⁶Cf. *Mort Artu* 3.19-20. Lacy, rightfully, points to Gawain as "a pivotal figure in the fall of Arthur" (4).

⁷Malory, in general, takes a dim view of Gawain. Gawain starts his "knightly" career by accidentally killing a young gentlewoman who wants to shield her defeated knight to whom Gawain refuses to grant mercy.

⁸For a running commentary on the significance of the various signs see d'Arcy 133-39.

⁹On Malory's concept of brotherhood see Ness Ihle 132-41.

¹⁰Geoffrey of Monmouth leaves his fate open, when he states that Arthur was fatally wounded and then taken to the isle of Avalon for the healing of his

wounds. Cf. Geoffrey of Monmouth Liber XI, 81-82 (253): "Sed et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus [...]." [The illustrious king Arthur too was mortally wounded; he was taken away to the island of Avalon to have his wounds tended (...).]

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- . *De diligendo Deo*. *Sancti Bernardi Opera*. Ed. L. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963. 3: 1-59.
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