III

RELIGIOUS CHIVALRY

While the conditions of life in their natural habitat, the feudal court and the field of battle, were encouraging the nobles of France to develop the ethical ideas discussed in the last chapter, two alien environments, the cloister and the bedroom, were forcing other points of view on their attention. Churchmen and ladies were creating and propagating their own distinct and rather contradictory conceptions of the perfect nobleman. The first of these, the chivalric ideas propounded by ecclesiastics, will be the subject of this chapter. Since one of the chief functions of the church was to teach the Christian mode of life, there had, of course, been no time since the evangelization of the Teutonic barbarians when the clergy was not attempting to modify the ethical ideas and practices of the warriors of western Europe. They had tried to confine the robust lust of the Frankish aristocrats within the bounds of permanent monogamic marriage and had sought to curb their pride, avarice, and gluttony. Even more important from the point of view of society were the church’s persistent efforts to reduce the aristocratic propensity to homicide and rapine or at least to mitigate its results. Although as early as the time of St. Augustine the church had modified its original abhorrence of all homicide to permit the killing of enemies and the execution of criminals at the com-
mand of a duly constituted authority, it steadfastly opposed the indiscriminate violence which marked the ninth and tenth centuries.¹ The direct line of attack on this evil, the attempt to persuade an aristocracy whose chief function was fighting that homicide should be abjured, was naturally not very fruitful, but the church made some progress in its efforts to mitigate the horrors of feudal warfare. The “Truce and Peace of God” forbade war on certain days and protected noncombatants such as clergy, women, merchants, and peasants. These edicts had some beneficial effect even when they were enforced only by the spiritual power of the church, and they furnished excellent programs for feudal princes like William the Conqueror who wished to establish order in their domains.² Then too by preaching the spiritual rewards that would be granted to those who fought the enemies of Christ the clergy moved many an eleventh-century noble to turn his martial energies against the Moslems who held Spain. In short from the sixth to the eleventh centuries the church strove to curb the typical vices of the warrior class or turn them into channels it approved. But during this period the exhortations of the clergy were addressed to the nobles as Christians who were bound as were all men to obey the laws of Christ. There was no suggestion that because a man was a noble he owed special obligations to the church and society. It was the appearance of this conception which seems to me to mark the beginning

¹ For an excellent discussion of the attitude of the early church fathers toward war see Gautier, La chevalerie, pp. 7-11.
² The best and most recent exposition of the effects of the “Truce of God” can be found in Julius Goebel, Jr., Felony and misdemeanor (New York, 1937), I, 297-328.
of religious chivalry. As long as the church simply maintained that a vicious noble was not a true Christian, its efforts and their results lie in the field of the historian of morals in general. Only when the clergy began to preach that a noble who violated certain rules was no true knight did its ideas come within the proper scope of the student of chivalry.

The earliest clear indication that I can find of the existence of this idea that a knight was peculiarly bound to obey and serve the church appears in the contemporary reports of the famous sermon with which in 1095 Pope Urban II roused the chivalry of Europe to undertake the First Crusade. While several of these reports definitely suggest this new conception of knighthood, a phrase in one of them expresses it unmistakably. "Now they may become knights who hitherto existed as robbers." In other words the nobles who ignored the church’s injunction to abstain from rapine were not knights. During the next fifty years after Urban’s speech at Clermont-Ferrand I can find only two unequivocal references to this idea. Suger, abbot of St. Denis, while speaking of the notorious noble brigand Thomas de Marly states that a church council declared him unworthy to wear the belt of a knight. William of St. Thierry, friend and biographer of Bernard of Clairvaux, in describing St. Bernard’s father calls him a man of “ancient and legitimate chivalry.” He made war according to the rules laid down by the church and

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abstained from plundering. In this half century after the First Crusade the chief expounder of the duties of knights toward the church was, of course, Bernard himself, but his remarks on the subject were addressed to the Templars. As the Templars were a military monastic order, in Bernard’s own words both knights and monks, his injunctions to them cannot be taken as an expression of his views on the duties and obligations of knights in general. Hence the famous De laude novae militiae is of little use to the historian of chivalry. In fact the employment of the word novae clearly implies that Bernard had no intention of restricting the term knight to those who followed his precepts. Thus the first half of the twelfth century furnishes little material to our purpose. It was not until after 1150 that ecclesiastical writers began to expound their views on the proper relations of knights to the church in extended and orderly form.

The most distinguished and probably the earliest of these mid-twelfth-century writers was the noted scholar John of Salisbury. In the sixth book of his Policraticus John presents a scathing criticism of the knights of his day and expounds his views on the qualities knights should possess and their proper function in society. As the minds of mediaeval men and particularly mediaeval churchmen were deeply imbued with the sanctity of

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6 Migne, Patrologia latina, CLXXXV, 227.
6 Ibid., CLXXXII, 921-940.
custom and tradition, John felt called upon to produce authority and precedent for his conception of knighthood. He did this by making the twelfth-century *miles* or knight the successor to the Roman *miles* or legionary. The Roman legionary was a picked man, highly trained and rigidly disciplined, who was bound by a special oath to the service of the prince and the state. Hence men who were to be made knights should be carefully selected for soundness of blood, vigor of body, and courage of heart. Before receiving their belt of knighthood, they should take the "soldier's oath" to serve their prince loyally. As no one could serve a prince loyally who did not obey God and the church, this obligation was implied in the oath. These chosen and oath-bound men should then be rigorously trained in military science and bodily exercise. They should eschew luxury and display—should be temperate and chaste. Courage, hardihood, and knowledge of strategy and the use of arms should be their characteristics. If they failed to observe their oath or if they proved cowardly and incompetent, they should be deprived of their knightly belts and severely punished. The social function of knights is described by John with complete clarity.

But what is the office of the duly ordained soldiery? To defend the church, to assail infidelity, to venerate the priesthood, to protect the poor from injuries, to pacify the province, to pour out their blood for their brothers (as the formula of their oath instructs them), and, if need be, to lay down their lives. The high praises of God are in their throat, and two-edged swords are in their hands to execute punishment on the nations and rebuke upon the peoples, and to bind their kings in chains and their nobles in links of iron. But to what end? To the end that they may serve madness, vanity, avarice, or
their own private self-will? By no means. Rather to the end that they may execute the judgment that is committed to them to execute; wherein each follows not his own will but the deliberate decision of God, the angels, and men, in accordance with equity and the public utility.  

Despite the somewhat puzzling quotation from the psalms the general purport of this statement is clear. The knight should be a policeman bound to execute the orders of church and state. Such in brief was John of Salisbury’s theory of chivalry. Some aspects of his ideas require separate discussion.

John, of course, was fully aware that the term knight in his day did not mean any specially selected man who had taken a distinctive oath but simply an adult noble who possessed complete military equipment. He solved this difficulty as had Pope Urban. At the end of his fiery denunciation of contemporary knights he said “For it is nothing to the point if the men I have been speaking of walk crookedly, for such men are not under military law because, if we speak accurately, none of them is a true soldier.”  

In short only those who followed his precepts were true knights. The coward, the brigand, the plunderer of churches, the oppressor of the poor, the glutton, and the debauché were false knights who should be deprived of the insignia of their rank. Although John clearly has the conception of the “order of knighthood”—an oath-bound brotherhood of chosen men possessing certain qualities and admitting certain obligations—he does not state this theory as definitely as later writers. Still the implication is unmistakable.

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8 Dickinson, pp. 199-200.
9 Ibid., p. 190.
The military profession was instituted by God. Priests and knights are compared. "The former are called by the tongue of the pontiff to the service of the altar and the care of the church. The latter are chosen for the defence of the commonwealth by the tongue of the leader." 10 The two divinely instituted orders which play so important a part in chivalric literature are here in embryo. While this idea undoubtedly sprang from the well-known threefold division of mankind into fighters, prayers, and workers, it is not quite the same thing. John’s clergy and knights are selected, consecrated groups, not mere subdivisions of humanity.

Naturally John of Salisbury’s chief interest lay in emphasizing the obligations of knights toward the church. "This rule must be enjoined upon and fulfilled by every soldier, namely, that he shall keep inviolate the faith which he owes first to God and afterwards to the prince and the commonwealth." 11 John could not understand how any prince could trust a man who was unfaithful to his obligations to God and His church. He was also anxious to encourage the inclusion of some form of religious ceremony among those by which a man was made a knight. He spoke with approval of a custom by which a candidate for knighthood offered his sword to God on the altar of a church. While John referred to this usage as if it were a generally accepted practice in his day, we have ample evidence to show that it was by no means universal. John was simply encouraging what he considered a wholesome custom. He conceived of the knight as the special servant of church and

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 201.
prince and felt that the ceremonies by which he was inducted into office should reflect both obligations.

The *Policraticus* contains all the essential features of religious chivalry. Later writers expanded the ideas and developed them in greater detail, but the general picture remained unchanged. A true knight must be courageous, hardy, and skilled in the use of arms, for fighting was his function in life. He must obey the commands of the church and use his sword in its defense. Finally he must serve his prince in defending the state and punishing criminals. His was the might that would enforce the laws of church and state. As John of Salisbury wrote in solemn scholarly Latin, his words cannot be considered as direct propaganda addressed to knights. He was laying down a program for his ecclesiastical contemporaries, and it soon found expression in vernacular writings and popular sermons. One can hardly conceive of anyone reading the *Policraticus* aloud in a castle hall, but Stephen of Fougères' *Livre des manières* might well have entertained a reasonably serious-minded baron.  

Stephen of Fougères had been, as had John of Salisbury, a clerk attached to the court of King Henry II of England and through that monarch's patronage had become bishop of Rennes. Some scholars have maintained that he read the *Policraticus* and drew from it many of his ideas, but this seems far from certain. One can merely say that he was a contemporary and very

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possibly an acquaintance of John of Salisbury and that both men used the same general fund of ideas. Stephen’s *Livre des manières* consists of a diatribe against the ways of his time interspersed with moral advice. His views on chivalry were very similar to John’s though expressed rather more definitely. A free man, born of a free mother, who had received the order of knighthood was bound to be effective in battle, brave, honest, loyal, and devoted to the church. He should not deny the church its tithes nor attempt to infeudate them. Unworthy knights should be deprived of their swords, have their spurs cut off, and be driven from the order. It should be noticed that Stephen emphasizes noble blood as a prerequisite for knighthood far more clearly than did John of Salisbury. Although John stated that knights should be of good family because such men were less likely to be cowards, his main interest was in their physical and mental fitness. Stephen assumed that a knight was a noble, a free man born of a free mother. Like John he insisted on the knights’ obligations to the church and wished to deprive the unworthy of their rank. He definitely stated what John had merely suggested—that knights formed an order similar to that of the clergy. There were two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. The former had been given to clerks to excommunicate the wicked; the latter had been given to knights so that they might cut off the feet or hands of malefactors. The good of society demanded the cooperation of these two orders in wielding their swords against evil. Thus in this simple vernacular poem we have the ecclesiastical conception of chivalry expressed in a form that knights could comprehend.
While the *Livre des manières* was written in a language and form that knights could understand, it seems unlikely that many nobles ever heard of it. Few knights could read, and despite its vigorous and pungent style this work can hardly have formed a part of the repertoire of wandering minstrels. For the successful propagation of their chivalric ideas the clergy were forced to seek other media. Probably the most effective course was to insert their teachings in songs and romances. At the very beginning of the twelfth century before ecclesiastical chivalry had assumed definite form under the hands of St. Bernard and John of Salisbury many of its ideas appeared in the *Chanson de Roland*. Even if one does not accept M. Bédier’s implication that this song was essentially a piece of advertising to attract pilgrims to the monasteries and shrines which lined the road to the tomb of St. James at Compostella, it is clear that most of the material for its composition was gathered from religious houses along that great pilgrimage route.\(^{13}\) In the second half of the twelfth century the piety of old age and a religiously minded patron moved Chrétien de Troyes to produce *Perceval*.\(^ {14}\) The creator of Galahad, the author of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, was almost certainly a Cistercian monk.\(^ {15}\)

The *Chanson de Roland* is based on the conception of loyal service to God and the emperor. Roland followed his liege lord against the enemies of Christ and as he died he extended his right gauntlet toward the sky

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in token of his vassalage to God. War against the infidel was one of the chief themes of the *chansons de geste*. Perceval and Galahad represent ecclesiastical chivalry expressed in terms of Arthurian romance. The latter divided his time about equally between performing heroic knightly deeds, resisting the advances of luscious ladies, and listening to moral discourses in monastic cloisters. In the earlier stories of the Arthurian cycle the knights roamed the world for the love of their ladies or in search of martial glory. The invention of the quest of the Holy Grail supplied a religious purpose for their activities. It would obviously be utterly reckless to state that Roland, Guillaume d’Orange, Perceval, Galahad, and the quest of the Holy Grail were invented in order to instill the ideas of religious chivalry in the nobles of France. One could argue equally plausibly that their existence in literature showed that these ideas were already popular among the knights and ladies for whom the stories were written. We can merely say that by finding their way into literature they forced themselves on the attention of the noble class.

One of the chief methods by which the church impressed its views on the laity was through sermons, and this medium was not neglected by the proponents of religious chivalry. Late in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century Master Alan of Lille, perhaps the most celebrated scholar of his day, composed a short handbook for preachers. Among many model sermons he included one particularly addressed to knights. “For this purpose have knights been specially instituted—that they may defend their fatherland and ward off from the church the injuries of violent men. . . . They prostitute
their knighthood who fight for profit. Those who take arms so that they may plunder are not knights but rob­bers and plunderers, not defenders but invaders.” 16 It is, of course, impossible to say how often such sermons were actually preached, but it seems safe to assume that at least once in his life a knight would hear the religious conception of chivalry propounded from the pulpit. 17

So far this chapter has consisted of a discussion of various ideas which churchmen of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were trying to instill in the minds of the nobles of France. There has been no attempt to describe a perfect knight according to the doctrines of religious chivalry, and this task would be essentially impossible. Except for St. Bernard whose words are inapplicable because they were addressed to the Tem­plars no writer furnishes a complete picture of the ideal knight from a purely ecclesiastical point of view. The closest approach to such a work is Le libre del orde de cauayleria written by the Catalan Ramon Lull towards the end of the thirteenth century 18 After passing his youth at the court of the king of Aragon, Lull turned religious and devoted the remainder of his life to schemes for winning the Moslems to Christianity through mission­ary efforts. When he wrote his book on knighthood, Lull was a clergyman, but the fact that he had lived for

16 Migne, Patrologia latina, CCX, 186.
17 For fuller information about sermons addressed to knights see A. Lecoy de la Marche, La chaire française au moyen âge (Paris, 1886), pp. 385-397.
18 I have used Caxton’s English translation. Mr. Byles’ introduction, which includes a detailed discussion of the differences between the versions, has enabled me to do so with confidence. The book of the order of chivalry, translated and printed by William Caxton (ed. Alfred T. P. Byles, Early English text society, London, 1926).
years as a lay gentleman influenced his views. Although in general his conception of chivalry is in accord with that of the church, his opinions would not have received the full approval of John of Salisbury or Alan of Lille. For instance John in common with most churchmen abhorred tournaments, but Lull considers them a necessary part of a knight’s activities. John frowned on worldly glory as a motive for knightly deeds, while Lull speaks of it as the only proper one for a true knight. The former writes from the point of view of the church alone, the latter from that of the knight as well. Hence Lull’s conception of chivalry is really a combination of the feudal and religious. Nevertheless his emphasis on the ideas propounded by the church seems to justify the discussion of his work in a chapter devoted to religious chivalry. There is no conclusive evidence as to how popular Lull’s book was in his own day, but by the fifteenth century it had become the standard handbook of chivalry. Originally written in Catalan it was translated into French by various writers who did not scruple to modify and add to their original. Caxton translated and printed one of these French versions while Sir Gilbert de la Haye rendered another into Scots. Caxton presented his edition to King Richard III and suggested that the king “command this book to be had and read unto other young lords knights and gentlemen within this realm that the noble order of chivalry be hereafter better used and honored than it has been in late days passed.”19 Caxton could not revive chivalry, but he did place Lull’s work in a dominant position among the sources used by later English writers on the subject.

19 Book of the order of chivalry, p. 125.
Lull’s ideas about chivalry can be arranged for convenience in discussion under four general headings—the origin and nature of the order, its function, the qualities proper to a knight, and the education of aspirants to knighthood. As was becoming in one who wished to make a complete and orderly presentation of his subject Lull began his discourse on chivalry with an account of the origin of the order. In an age which traced the descent of both French and English from the exiled Trojans this description of the inception of chivalry was bound to be purely mythical: at a time when virtue had disappeared and vice reigned on earth God divided all men into thousands and in each group chose the most loyal, strongest, bravest, and best educated man to be a knight. Having supplied an exalted origin for chivalry Lull went on to discuss the nature and position of the order. Here the author’s knightly background decidedly influenced his ideas. The dignity of the order of chivalry was so great that it was not enough that its members be chosen men equipped with the best of arms but they should enjoy eminent worldly rank as well. A knight should be lord over many men and should have a squire to care for him and his mount. The common people should work to support the knight so that he might live in complete economic security and pass his time in hunting and martial exercise. Ideally every knight ought to be master of a large territory and its inhabitants. Unfortunately there were too many knights, and only a few of them could be kings or great barons. Hence all temporal princes should choose only knights as their officers so that as many as possible of the order could enjoy the dignity to which they were entitled. Lull was
forced to admit that knights lacked the education required of a judge, but they were pre-eminently fitted for all other offices. This is a fascinating piece of knightly propaganda! Lull in common with the nobles of his day resented the inclination of the feudal princes to fill their administrative offices with obedient and tractable townsfolk. In order to heighten still further the dignity of the order Lull followed the tradition of comparing chivalry and clergy. Knights and clerks held the two most honorable offices in the world and should cooperate with each other in every way. As God instituted both orders, no member of either one was justified in attacking the other. The clergy urge the common people to virtue by learning and example, while the knights accomplish the same end by the terror inspired by their swords. In short Lull maintained that the members of the divinely instituted order of chivalry should be rich and powerful nobles who combined with the clergy to enforce God's will.

The function of the chivalric order was to supply the force needed to maintain the laws of God and man. The common people labored and cultivated the earth because of their terror of the knights. The same dread made them obey the laws of church and state. The knight's first duty was to maintain and defend the Holy Catholic Faith and the church that nurtured it. His second was to maintain and defend his earthly lord and his native land. His devotion to the church should lead him to protect its special charges—women, widows, orphans, and all the weak and helpless. His obligations to his lord and country included not only their defense against foreign foes but also the suppression of robbers and
criminals of all kinds. In order to keep in condition to perform his duties a knight should devote himself to martial exercise and noble sports. He should joust, tourney, and hunt wild beasts. Once more Lull’s youth had its say. The obligations of his ideal knight were those envisaged by John of Salisbury and other ecclesiastical writers, but his exercises and diversions were those of the extremely imperfect nobles of the day. Lull could not counsel knights to abandon chase and joust.

The qualities which Lull considered requisite for a knight were a combination of martial and Christian virtues. The former were, of course, absolutely necessary. A knight had to be brave, strong of body, and skilled in the use of arms. Lull did suggest, however, that bravery was more effective when combined with intelligence. Then the knight should be courteous to all, keep himself well armed and well dressed, and maintain a suitable retinue. He should abjure perjury and lies, should be humble and chaste. Finally toward the end of his work Lull listed the Christian virtues and vices and showed how the former were necessary to and the latter destructive of a true knight. But martial and spiritual qualities were not enough for Lull’s perfect knight. While he admitted that it was possible for new knightly lines to be founded by exceptional men, he emphasized the importance of noble birth. His translators dropped the qualification and enlarged on the rule. Beauty or at least normality of physique was another qualification—one who was lame, too fat, or in any way deformed should never be made a knight. Furthermore the knight had to be rich enough to maintain himself in the way of life proper to his place in society. Most
RELIGIOUS CHIVALRY

important of all a true knight had to be actuated by a spirit of dedication. If he sought solely his own profit and honor rather than the reputation of the order as a whole, he was not fit to be a knight.

A large part of Le libre del orde de cauayleria is devoted to a discussion of the training of aspirants to knighthood and the ceremonies which should attend their reception into the order. As these questions concern the means of achieving the chivalric ideal rather than the ideas of chivalry, they are not entirely germane to my subject, but they are too interesting to be passed over. Lull expressed dissatisfaction with the contemporary method of training young nobles. The son of a knight was placed in a noble household where he acquired his knightly education while serving as page and squire. Lull criticized this eminently practical apprentice system not for inefficiency but for lack of dignity. Other professions, such as the religious, law, and medicine, were learned from books, and the military was entitled to equal consideration. He wanted the knowledge that was requisite for a knight reduced to writing so that aspirants could study it in schools of chivalry. On the basis of these statements Lull has been charged with expressing the utterly silly idea that skill in arms could be learned from books, but this does not seem justified. He did not want to abolish the period of apprenticeship. He merely wished to add to it some formal study in books. Furthermore it is clear from the early part of Le libre del orde de cauayleria that he considered this work a suitable textbook for young nobles who aspired to be knights. He did not conceive of having squires read books on the care of horses—such
things they would learn by practice. It was the history of the chivalric order, its proper function in society, and the ethical principles which governed true knights that he wished the squires to study. In short Lull was partly the author encouraging the reading of his book and partly the enthusiast seeking to propagate an ideal. After his term of service as page and squire Lull wished the young noble to attend a school of chivalry where he would learn the duties and qualities of a true knight by reading *Le libre del orde de cauayleria.*

The chief interest in Lull’s description of the ceremonies which should be performed when a man was made a knight lies in the prominent part given to the church. John of Salisbury and Stephen of Fougeres had wished to have the aspirant to knighthood offer his sword on an altar as a token of his obligations to God and the church. Lull adds so many religious observances that the whole ceremony becomes decidedly ecclesiastical. On the day before he was to be dubbed a knight the young noble confessed. That night he passed in the church fasting and praying. In the morning he attended mass and listened to a sermon. The actual dubbing was performed while the squire knelt before the altar. The knight who was receiving him into the order girded on the novice’s sword, kissed him, and gave him the ceremonial blow. Then the new knight rode through the town so that all could see him. That same day he gave a great feast for everyone who had attended the ceremony. Finally he and the knight who had dubbed him exchanged gifts and the heralds were duly feed. Again one seems to see Lull in a dual rôle. The solemn missionary to the Moslems described the formal ceremonies,
but the gay young Catalan courtier planned the closing festivities.

One more aspect of Lull's book is worthy of mention—his discussion of the symbolical significance of the various articles which made up the equipment of a knight. The men of the Middle Ages were devoted to symbolism, but nowhere did this taste flourish more magnificently than among the ecclesiastical writers on chivalry. Every article of knightly equipment, even every part of an article, had its significance. True, no two writers were likely to attach the same meaning to an article, but this merely gave freer rein to the creative imagination. One of the earliest complete systems of symbolism for knightly arms was produced by Robert of Blois in his Enseignement des princes.20 A few examples must suffice. The sword is clear and well polished—the knight should be honest and straight. The shield represents charity which covers many sins. The lance which pierces the foe before he gets near symbolizes foresight.

Lull began his discussion of this subject by pointing out that every article of priestly vestments had its symbolic significance. Hence as knights were an order similar to the clergy, their equipment should also have a meaning. The sword is shaped like a cross. This signifies that knights should use the sword to slay foes of the cross. The sword has two edges to remind the knight that he should defend chivalry and justice. The shield symbolizes the office of a knight. As a knight places his shield between himself and his enemy, so a knight

stands between prince and people. The knight should receive the blows aimed at his lord as his shield wards off those aimed at him. The lance represents truth, and its pennon marks the fact that truth fears not falseness. There is no need to go further. Enough has been said to show the general nature of this fascinating if rather fruitless pastime of inventing symbolic significance for the various pieces of a knight’s equipment. Undoubtedly whenever an aspirant to knighthood followed Lull’s precepts so far as to expose himself to a sermon before he was dubbed, he heard some priest’s private version of what his equipment signified.

As the ecclesiastical conception of chivalry reached its fullest elaboration in Le livre del orde de cauayleria, there is no need to discuss the vast number of fourteenth and fifteenth-century works which dealt with all or part of the ideas which composed it. The continued popularity of Lull’s book and the insignificance of the changes made in it by translators and adaptors show that the ideas of religious chivalry underwent no important modification during these two centuries. As our next step is to examine how completely these ideas were accepted and put in practice by the nobles of France, it seems well to summarize them here. The basic concept of religious chivalry was the idea that the true knight as distinguished from the ordinary nobleman recognized certain obligations to God and the church and that these true knights formed the order of chivalry which was closely similar in nature to the clerical order. Its members upheld the church and the faith against all their foes. They protected the helpless and suppressed the violent. Furthermore they practiced the
Christian virtues and obeyed the commands of the church in every respect. In short the ecclesiastical writers and preachers simply took those precepts of feudal chivalry that did not conflict with the teachings of the church and added to them certain ideas which they considered all important. The latter as summarized above formed the concepts peculiar to religious chivalry.

An examination into the extent to which a set of ideals was accepted by a class of society is an extremely difficult task especially when that class was in general illiterate and left few statements of its ideas and motives. Historians have been inclined to search for a practice in accord with an idea and then calmly assume that the idea furnished the motive for the practice. The usual treatment of the crusades is an illustration of this tendency. The crusades have been pointed to as evidence of the influence of church ideas of chivalry on the mind of the feudal noble. Now it is perfectly true that if a knight accepted the precept of religious chivalry that it was his chief duty to protect the church from its foes, he might well feel obligated to go on a crusade, but the fact that he became a crusader did not prove that he would have considered himself no true knight had he not done so. Many purely secular motives could impel a noble to join a crusade. A younger son might hope to conquer a fief from the Moslems. A baron hard pressed by his neighbors might hope to gain the church’s aid and protection. An unsuccessful rebel might flee the wrath of his lord. A restless and war-loving young noble who lived in a district where some feudal prince was effectively suppressing disorder might go to Spain or the Holy Land in search of adventure and opportunities to
fight. In fact one could go on almost indefinitely listing plausible secular reasons why a knight might undertake a crusade and illustrate each one with the case of a noble who apparently had that motive.

To turn to religious motives the most obvious was the desire for salvation or more exactly for the spiritual indulgences promised crusaders. But there was nothing essentially chivalric about this motive—salvation was the fundamental object of all Christian life. The influence of the religious conception of chivalry can only be demonstrated by showing that nobles went crusading because they believed that their reputations as good knights demanded it. Now this idea is not entirely absent from the few documents which apparently expressed crusading motives, the poems written by departing crusaders. Conan of Béthune, who took part in the crusade of 1189, pointed out to the ladies who were left at home that if they were unfaithful to their absent lovers they would sin with cowards and worthless men for all good men would be on the crusade. An anonymous poem of about the same time stated that “God has called us to his aid and no worthy man should fail him.” Count Thibaut of Champagne was more explicit.

All the worthless will stay here, those who love neither God, nor the good, nor honor, nor worth. . . . Now they will go, the valiant bachelors who love God and the glory of this world, those who wisely wish to go to God, and the useless, the cowards will remain. Blind indeed is he who does not make

22 Ibid., pp. 69-72.
once in his life an expedition to succor God and who for so little loses the praise of the world.\textsuperscript{23}

The idea here is clear and definite. A noble who refused to crusade deserved to be considered a worthless knight.

Although the ideas of religious chivalry had some place in the minds of crusading nobles, no one who reads *Les chansons de croisade* collected by M. Bédier can feel that they had a very dominant influence. The search for salvation was clearly the chief and usually the sole religious motive. In this connection I cannot resist quoting a most illuminating passage from the troubadour Aimeric de Pégulhan.

\textit{Behold! without renouncing our rich garments, our station in life, courtesy, and all that pleases and charms we can obtain honor down here and joy in Paradise. To conquer glory by fine deeds and escape hell; what count or king could ask more? No more is there need to be tonsured or shaved and lead a hard life in the most strict order if we can revenge the shame which the Turks have done us. Is this not truly to conquer at once land and sky, reputation in the world and with God?}\textsuperscript{24}

This may not represent the highest form of Christian enthusiasm, but I suspect that it gives a fair picture of the motives that moved most crusaders. In short while I have little doubt that the ideas of religious chivalry formed part of the mixture of reasons that led men to leave their homes to fight the infidel, it seems unlikely that chivalric conceptions were often the chief motives and their presence is practically impossible to demonstrate. Knights sought to save their souls by founding

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp. 171-173.

\textsuperscript{24} Alfred Jeanroy, \textit{La poésie lyrique des troubadours} (Paris, 1934), II, 208.
monasteries, going on pilgrimages, and fighting Moslems, but this furnishes little or no evidence as to how far they had accepted the chivalric ideas expressed by such writers as John of Salisbury and Ramon Lull.

If one turns to the rest of the extremely scanty supply of documents which can be said to represent the views of the noblemen of France, one may find here and there indications of the existence of these ideas. For instance the conception that a knight should be a policeman for the church seems to have had some currency. The biographer of William Marshal felt that his hero had acted in knightly fashion when he plundered a renegade monk of money that the latter intended to loan at usury.  

Joinville clearly approved of a knight who struck a Jew to the ground when he heard him uttering blasphemy.  

There was also apparently a feeling that a knight should not harm religious personages. Froissart viewed the burning of abbeys and raping of nuns as decidedly unworthy of good knights.  

The biographer of Marshal Boucicaut was much impressed by the Marshal’s action in founding an order or fellowship of knights sworn to protect widows or other ladies in distress.  

Undoubtedly such items could be multiplied, but the meagerness of the material available would prevent the formation of any reasonably sound generalization.

At the same time it is certain that some precepts of religious chivalry never gained any acceptance among the feudal class. Obviously no professional warrior was

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25 Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, I, lines 6677-6816.
27 Chroniques de Froissart, I, 171.
28 Livre des faicts du Maréchal de Boucicaut, p. 255.
going to develop an abhorrence of homicide. The church prohibited tournaments, but they continued to be considered by the nobles of France as the most proper occupation for a knight. In fact the Avignon popes who lived under the dominance of the chivalrous kings of the Valois line felt obliged to rescind their predecessors' decrees against this form of knightly sport.  

Finally it was useless for the church to preach against the taking of booty and ransoms. As William Marshal lay on his death bed, one of his knights pointed out to him that according to the teachings of the church no man could be saved who had not returned everything that he had taken from anyone. This did not worry the Marshal.

Henry, listen to me a while. The clerks are too hard on us. They shave us too closely. I have captured five hundred knights and have appropriated their arms, horses, and their entire equipment. If for this reason the kingdom of God is closed to me, I can do nothing about it, for I cannot return my booty. I can do no more for God than to give myself to him, repenting all my sins. Unless the clergy desire my damnation, they must ask no more. But their teaching is false—else no one could be saved.

Perhaps William was unusual in daring to question the validity of the church's teaching, but most of his contemporaries must have shared his disregard of its precepts on this question. Certainly I can find no evidence that any feudal noble felt that homicide committed in

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tourney or private war and the taking of booty and ransoms were anything but eminently proper in a knight.

As a matter of fact I am inclined to believe, though my evidence is quite tenuous, that the noble class abducted God from his position as founder and chief of religious chivalry and made him the patron of their own ideas on the subject. In the mind of Geoffrey of Villehardoin God was certainly on the side of the hardy knights who in defiance of the commands of pope, legate, and ordinary Christian decency captured the cities of Zara and Constantinople and had no use for the cowards who obeyed the church's order to go to Palestine. This was not, of course, very surprising. Soldiers have always been inclined to assume that God was on their side and have rarely failed to find priests to confirm their opinion. Particularly illuminating is the biographer of William Marshal's version of a speech delivered by Aimery de St. Maur, master of the Temple in England, as he stood by the bedside of the dying earl.

Marshal, attend. It pleases me that you give yourself to God. He has granted you a great favor—that you will never be separated from Him. He has shown you this in your life, and He will do the same after your death. In the world you have had more honor than any other knight for prowess, wisdom, and loyalty. When God granted you His grace to this extent, you may be sure He wished to have you at the end. You depart from the age with honor. You have been a gentleman and you die one.\textsuperscript{31}

Add to this the words which the same author placed in the mouth of Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, as he preached the Marshal's funeral sermon:

\textsuperscript{31} Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 284-5.
Behold all that remains of the best knight who ever lived. . . . We have here our mirror, you and I. Let each man say his paternoster that God may receive this Christian into His Glory and place him among His faithful vassals, as he so well deserves.\(^{32}\)

Now William Marshal was no devotee of the ideas of religious chivalry. He had passed his life in industrious homicide in tourney and battle. For years he lived on ransoms won in tournaments. True, he had founded monasteries, but he had also plundered bishops. As these eloquent eulogies were being pronounced he lay under an excommunication launched by the bishop of Kilkenny. There can be no doubt that his biographer knew all this. To that anonymous writer who was so thoroughly imbued with the ideas of feudal chivalry it seemed impossible that God should not appreciate the virtues of a good knight. Prowess, wisdom, loyalty, generosity—what more could God ask?

On the whole it seems clear that the ideas of religious chivalry were current among the nobles of mediaeval France and may to some slight extent have modified their ethical conceptions. But it is certain that they never became so dominant in the feudal mind that the ideal of knighthood propounded by the church replaced the one developed by the knights themselves. The men of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries who were admired by their contemporaries as models of knighthood were not perfect knights according to the ecclesiastical ideas. St. Louis who probably came as close to the church ideal as a living king could was admired as monarch and saint rather than as a knight.

It was men like King Philip of Valois and his son John the Good, the Black Prince, and Bertrand du Guesclin who were considered the best knights of their day. In short the religious conception of chivalry made some impression on the mind of the feudal caste, but it never gained mastery over it. The virtues of feudal chivalry remained the qualities that were admired in a knight.

Obviously if I am correct in my belief that the ideas of religious chivalry made only a slight impression on the ethical conceptions of the nobility, they cannot have had much effect on its practices. Of course one could list an enormous number of nobles who went on crusades, but as I have attempted to show in a previous paragraph it is not necessary to believe that these ideas played any great part in persuading them to do so. Then most knights accepted without question the faith preached by the church and observed more or less carefully the established forms of the Christian cult. Many knights were pious, devout, and obedient Christians. But this could be said of the nobles of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries—it has little to do with chivalry. If the religious ideas of chivalry had ever been extensively practiced, one would expect to find a time when knights refrained from rapine and casual manslaughter, protected the church and its clergy, and respected the rights of helpless non-combatants in war. I can find no evidence that there ever was such a period. Many writers on the subject, both mediaeval and modern, have postulated a “golden age of chivalry” when the church’s precepts were rigorously observed. Usually this glorious era has been placed in the twelfth century.33

33 See Raymond L. Kilgour, The decline of chivalry as shown in the
nately twelfth-century writers like John of Salisbury and Stephen of Fougeres were loud in their denunciations of the knights of their day, and other evidence thoroughly corroborates their statements. A case of some sort might be made for the claim that less regard was shown for human life and the persons and property of clergy and non-combatants in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than in the twelfth and thirteenth, but it would not be very convincing as a manifestation of chivalric decline. While it is possible to cite many more atrocities from the Hundred Years War than from the earlier period, one must remember that there is much more information available about the events of the later era. Then too the increase in the use of non-noble professional soldiers undoubtedly intensified the horrors of war. There seems no sound reason for believing that the knights of the later Middle Ages observed the precepts of the church any less scrupulously than had their predecessors. In only one respect can one find evidence of definite variation in practice. From the middle of the twelfth century to the middle of the thirteenth the lives of noblemen appear to have been sacred except on the field of battle or the tourneying ground. Assassination and execution for political or criminal offenses was so rare as to be practically unknown. I can advance no explanation of this interesting phenomenon unless it be that the newly developed solidarity of the feudal caste had not yet succumbed to political necessities. At any rate there is no reason for connecting it with religious

French literature of the late Middle Ages (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1937), pp. 4-5. Although he is fully aware of contemporary criticisms of knights, Mr. Kilgour places the great age of chivalry in the twelfth century.
chivalry. Thus while it seems likely that individual knights were occasionally influenced in their practice by the ideals of chivalry propagated by churchmen, no grounds exist for believing that these ideas changed the behavior of the nobility as a whole. Religious chivalry as expressed by the writers of the Middle Ages has always appealed strongly to romantically inclined lovers of mankind. Virtue combined with might is perennially attractive. Nevertheless it seems probable that this fascinating conception was never much more than a pleasant dream.