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THE SYMBOLISM OF THE HOLY GRAIL

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE GRAIL

In PERCEVAL ou LE CONTE del GRAAL by CHRETIEN de TROYES

and PARZIVAL by WOLFRAM von ESCHENBACH

by

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P R E F A C E

If I may venture to make a bold comparison, I have often felt like Sir Perceval while writing this thesis. Like him, I set out on a quest for the Holy Grail. My quest, indeed, was not nearly so dramatic, as it took place on paper and in my mind and imagination. In the allegorical, symbolical sense, however, namely in that the quest for the Holy Grail symbolizes a quest for knowledge, in Perceval's case the knowledge of God, mine has been just as dramatic and dangerous a mission. There were many knights to slay on the way. The first one and the worst one was the Red Knight called Hopeless Involvement. But there were many who, with the devotion and interest of Trevrizent and Sigune, helped me on my way. My special gratitude goes to Miss Wright who, unlike Gornemant, encouraged me to be overcurious.

K. E. N.

Richmond, May 1962
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INTRODUCTION

The Grail is one of the most mysterious objects of medieval literature. Some authors have described it as a vessel to hold food which could procure anything the one who possessed it desired. Others have described it not as a vessel at all, but as a stone and food-providing talisman with magical powers (Wolfram). Others have made it into a chalice containing the wine of the Last Supper or rather the transubstantiated blood of Christ, thus making it the sacred vessel of the Lord's Supper which by legend was salvaged by Joseph of Arimathea. Still others have described it as a crystal vase filled with blood (Diu Grône, a German work dating from 1212 by Heinrich von dem Türlin), or as a cup into which a lance bleeds, or even as a dish containing a bleeding head (the Welsh Peredur). Thus there are several different descriptions of it, and its power has been depicted in many ways. Which is the original description of the Grail? Which is the right one? Volumes have been written about the question, but the hypotheses are all conjecture and the conclusions are speculative. Nobody knows. This is not to say that the conclusions reached do not throw light on the likely origin of the Grail, for they are very valuable critical studies in a vast and fascinating field. It is to say, however, that insofar as the earliest written sources
which the Grail writers profess to use are nonexistent today, we will never be able to prove its basic origin with substantial written evidence.

It is an extremely interesting study to pursue a comparative analysis of the Grail and its meaning in all of the known treatments of the subject. The conclusions of such a study can be foregone. One will find as many different interpretations of the Grail as there have been authors to describe it. Some of the characteristics of the Grail may be traced back through the mysteries of folklore to obvious oriental beginnings. We have already mentioned its Christian interpretation in its capacity of serving as the chalice of the Lord's Supper. Other characteristics of the Grail are reminiscent of celtic-pagan folklore. It will not be the objective of this study to follow in the footsteps of the famous scholars Nitze, Iselin, Weston, Mergell, Brown, Waite, Nutt, Golther, Loomis, and all the others who have spent their lives seeking out the grounds and evidence for connecting the Grail with its multiple sources. The most recent conclusions based on the colossal research of Weston, Brown, and Nitze have been summed up by Dr. Loomis. The fact stands that the Grail is an object that is universal in its significance. In its nature it goes farther back than Christianity to pagan sources of religion and folklore.

1. Cf. p. 4 & pp. 7-9 for a detailed discussion of Wolfram's and Chrétien's indication of their sources.
In turn, insofar as pagan folklore goes back to the very secrets of the origins of culture, the Grail legend started with primitive man. It is by a process of syncretism that the originally pagan legend was more and more christianized. Although Chrétien did not necessarily identify the Grail with the Mass, others did, notably Robert de Boron in his Joseph and Wolfram in his Parzivak. As we shall see in the present discussion of the Grail it was an object which lent itself readily to the medieval mind for a Christian interpretation.

The aim of this study rather will be to investigate the significance of the Grail as found in Chrétien de Troyes' and Wolfram von Eschenbach's works. Moreover, as the title professes, it will be my concern to discuss the symbolic nature of the Grail in the works of these two authors. As such the discussion of sources of the Grail material as a legend will not be evaluated here, except insofar as a source discussion may be pertinent to the origin of the Grail as a symbol.

There are many reasons for limiting myself to the Grail accounts of Chrétien de Troyes and of Wolfram von Eschenbach. The first existent work to mention the Grail is Chrétien's famous romance entitled: Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte del Graal. Therefore by virtue of its being the first existent source it will be valuable for any discussion of the Grail. His story, however, was left unfinished.

4. Throughout this thesis I have used William Roach's edition of the ms. f: 12576, also known as ms. T (Paris Bibliothèque Nationale), 1959, ms. T being one among 15 extant ms. of Chrétien's work.
Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote his story ten or more years later and presents the whole story, in his way, quite consciously changing many details found in Chrétien's work which he obviously knew well. His story is not the only complete narrative of the Grail story, but it is the only one where all the motifs are harmoniously linked together. Hence the choice of Wolfram's work for the present discussion.

As far as Chrétien's sources are concerned Chrétien himself gives us an indication by stating in his prologue that a "livre" was given him by his patron Count "Philipes de Flandres":

Crestiens, qui entent et paine
Par le commandement le conte
A rimoier le meillor conte
66 Qui soit contez a cort roial:
67 Ce est li Contes del Graal,
   Dont li quens li bailla le livre.
   (Chr. P. vss. 63-66)

Foerster is of the opinion that the "livre" of Count Philip contained the Grail story exclusively as Chrétien expressly says in vss. 66 and 67 which means it did not include Parceval or Gauvain. Be that as it may, Chrétien makes it clear that the material concerning the Grail is not of his own invention. It is also important to note that he wrote the romance at the wish of his patron and that he considered it would be the best of his works.

We actually know very little about Chrétien de Troyes. As it is the case with Wolfram von Eschenbach, all that we do know about him comes from his works. His dedication of Lancelot to Marie de Champagne who became Countess of Champagne by her marriage

with Count Henri in 1164 indicates that the work was written after that date. A second date may be derived from Chrétien's dedication of *Perceval* to Philip of Flanders who went on a Crusade in September 1190 and died en route in 1191. Thus Chrétien's *Perceval* must have been begun before the year 1190. We can therefore estimate that Chrétien lived from approximately 1130 to 1190; more exact knowledge we do not have. There can be little doubt that Chrétien received a clerical training without entering the priestly order. Chrétien gives us much less information about himself than Wolfram does in his works, and unless new documents are found, we shall most likely remain very ignorant of the poet's biography.

Chrétien gives us a list of his works in the beginning of *Cligès*: *Erec*, *Les Commendements Ovide*, *L'Art d'amors*, *Li Mors de l'Espaule*, *Li Rois Marc et Iseut la Blonde*, *Le MENCE de la Hupe*, and, *l'Aronde et le Rossignol*. After *Cligès* there followed three works which he signed: *Lancelot*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*; *Yvain Le Chevalier au Lion*; and *Perceval ou le Conte del Graal*. 6

It is quite possible that we owe it to Chrétien's poetic artistry that the Grail theme, the *Perceval*-Gauvain theme, and King Arthur were linked together. After all Chrétien had already written numerous romances of which *Erec*, *Yvain* and *Lancelot* all relate events of Knights of the Round Table. It seems plausible

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that Chrétien would entwine the Grail theme with a milieu he already knew so well. In any event it is safe to say that the Perceval theme, the motif of a pure-hearted young man who goes out into the world and gets to know life through failure and hard times to become in the end a ruler and king, is a theme found in the folklore tradition of all Aryan peoples. One of these is the famous fifteenth-century English Syr Percyvelle of Galles which contains no reference to the Grail whatsoever.

Unfortunately Chrétien died before he could finish the romance, and the unfinished romance became the preoccupation of numerous continuators, who each had different ideas about how the story should end. Some even wrote prologues to explain the genealogy of Perceval. These continuations and prologues are not all equally good, but we cannot study their importance in this particular discussion.

By the time Wolfram von Eschenbach took over the Grail theme it had been definitely linked to the Arthuriad. If Rachbauer's conclusion is correct, namely that Wolfram used Chrétien's Li Contes del Graal as a source, although most likely none of the now existent French mss. could have been this source, then it is obvious why Wolfram connected the Arthuriad and the Grail.

The question about Wolfram's source or sources is a difficult one. Weston, Fouquet, Rachbauer, and Singer have contributed the most toward solving this problem. Wolfram himself says that he had a manuscript written by Kyōt of Toledo who found his information in an account by Flegitanis, a great astrologer from the lineage of Solomon, who had read about the Grail in the stars.  

There have been mainly three schools of thought about Wolfram's sources. Some have taken Wolfram at his word, namely that Wolfram did have a source by an author named Kyōt. Others believe that Chrétien was Wolfram's only source. And still others believe that he had a source older than Chrétien's which because of the many agreements between the two mss. was the same source Chrétien used.

There is no doubt as to the fact that Wolfram's poem is on the whole the story of Perceval as told by Chrétien. In lines 827,1-14, however, Wolfram says:

```plaintext
Ob von Troies meister Kristjan
disem maere hēt unrecht getēn,
daz wol zūrnen Kīōt.
der uns diu rehten maere entbōt,
endehaft gilt der Provenzāl,
wie Herzoloiden kint den grāl
erwerp, als im daz gorden was,
dō in verworhte Amfortas,
von Provenze in tiuschiu lant
diu rehten maere uns sint gesant
und dirre Āventiure endes zil.
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8. vss. 416,2ff; 431,2; 453,5ff; 455,2ff; 776,10; 805,10. Throughout this thesis I have used the Albert Leitzmann edition of Wolfram's Parzival. Max Niemeyer Verlag (Halle/Saale:1928), Dritte verbesserte Auflage.
niht mār dā von nū sprechen wil
ich Wolfram von Eschenbach
wan als dort der meister sprach.
(W. P. vss. 827,1-14)

Despite this claim of Wolfram, Fourquet, the French scholar who
has done the most research concerning the relationship of Wolfram's
work to Chrétien's, says that he can have no doubts that Chrétien's
Conte del Graal was the source par excellence of Wolfram's Perzival.9
His explanation of Wolfram's rejection of Chrétien's version seems
the most probable: "Le fait capitl n'est pas que Wolfram
nomme une autre source, Kyôt, c'est qu'il prenne parti contre
Chrétien. Il ne manque pas d'auteurs médiévaux qui invoquent une
source imaginaire; ils le font ou bien pour donner plus de prestige
à une source anonyme, ou bien pour couvrir leurs propres in-
ventions. Mais conçoit-on un auteur qui se prive du bénéfice d'une
autorité comme celle de Chrétien, qui renie un garant de premier
ordre, devant un public à qui le nom et l'oeuvre du Maître sont
familiers?"10 But there is more. Wolfram accuses him of having
done injustice to the story ("disem maere hat unreht getān").
Fourquet comments, "Faut-il entendre par là qu'il lui en veut de
ne l'avoir pas achevée l'histoire. Ce serait une façon bien
étrange de s'exprimer. Et ceci ne lui interdirait pas d'invoquer
dans les livres précédents l'autorité du maître de Troyes."
11

Wolfram's Parzival is a hero. According to Fourquet Wolfram must
have been disappointed when the ms. W only contained the continuation

9. Jean Fourquet, Wolfram d'Eschenbach et le Conte del Graal,
(Strasbourg:1938), p. 171.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
of Gauvain and did not finish the adventure of the "vrai héros". "Même s'il contenait la 'continuation Perceval' il ne donnait pas encore un dénouement définitif, endehaft. Ainsi, Wolfram aurait pris cette décision grave d'abandonner le récit de W₂, sans aller plus loin que n'allait W₁, puis d'amener cette fin des fins- endes zil, qu'il ne trouvait pas chez Chrétien. Ce n'était pas peu de chose pour Wolfram que de prendre ainsi position contre un maître célèbre, au risque peut-être de mécontenter un protecteur qui lui avait procurer le ms., et qui s'attendait sans doute à entendre conter en vers allemands toute l'histoire."¹²

We know very little about the life of the great German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach. What we do know comes from his own works and must clearly be taken with a grain of salt. He was not a member of the higher nobility, but prided himself on being a knight and won his lady's love with chivalrous deeds as well as with song. Margaret Richey has called him, "the greatest poet of medieval Germany"¹³. She says, "The creator of Parzival, the German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach stands out among his contemporaries as chief interpreter of the life of medieval chivalry, as an artist capable of expressing, within the limits of romantic form, the epic magnitude of the age he lived in."¹⁴

The year of Wolfram's birth is estimated to be around 1165.

¹⁴. Ibid., p. 1.
He was born in Eschenbach near Ansbach in Bavaria. Wolfram may have traveled widely. He mentions several places near Eschenbach, and many Wolfram lovers claim that the Trevrizent episode reflects knowledge of Italy and present-day Jugoslavia. He was often a guest at the court of Landgrave Hermann von Thüringen (1155-1217) in the Wartburg, and it was Hermann who gave the poet the French manuscript of the now lost chanson de geste Bataille d'Aliscans from which he wrote his poem Willehalm. At the Wartburg he is known to have become acquainted with Walther von der Vogelweide, the famous lyric poet.

According to the Feirefiz episode Wolfram was a very tolerant man and had very strong religious convictions. He also possessed a very keen sense of humor which is very evident in his works. Despite his surprising statement that he was illiterate, Wolfram was extremely well acquainted with the literature of his time. He knew the Rolandslied and the Nibelungenlied, the works of Fritzlar, Veldehe, Hermann von Aue, and Gottfried von Strassburg. He was also acquainted with the romance of Tristan by Eilhart.

Wolfram began his literary career with a few Minnelieder. His first major work, however, was probably Parzival, which is most certainly his masterpiece. Then followed his Titurel and Willehalm.

Wolfram probably died soon after the death of Landgrave
Hermann von Thüringen whose death was recorded in the chronicles of the year 1217. Parzival, the work we are now discussing, was most likely written between the years 1195 and 1210.

The reason Wolfram's Parzival has been chosen for this study along with the first existent work on the Holy Grail by Chrétien will be evident after the following statement: "In all the literature of the Holy Grail we find no treatment so novel, so complete, and so satisfying as Wolfram's."  

Both works, Chrétien's and Wolfram's, are literary masterpieces of the Middle Ages. The story of the Grail can be placed along side of Dante's Commedia in symbolical content. Like most medieval writings the Grail romances are full of allegory, remote allusions to symbolic relationships, and striking analogies, all of which leave us with a sense of wonder and amazement. First of all we wonder whether or not a connection which we might find symbolical was put there accidentally or not; we wonder whether we are seeing too much or too little symbolic value. It is characteristic of the authors never to tell us when they are using symbolism and when they are not. Wolfram does not say that the three drops of blood on the snow which remind Parzival of his beloved wife are symbolical of three characteristics of his wife, or whether there is any meaning in the number three, or whether the colors red on white have any special significance. He

leaves it up to the reader, or, rather in medieval times, the
hearer to discover whatever he may. Thus in order to understand
the work itself we must discuss the characteristics of symbolism
in general and medieval symbolism in particular.
Symbols are fascinating. They can render perceptible something which is invisible by its very nature; they can make conceivable the eternal mysteries of life; they can express the inexpressible.

Symbols are also dangerous. They can mislead into a hazy mist of incomprehension and misinterpretation; they can seem present as objects in themselves and thus lead to the substitution of the symbol for the thing symbolized; and in reverse they can be sought in an object where there is nothing symbolic. The more the student of symbolism ventures to understand symbolism, the more he realizes that a precise definition must be found in order to have any insight into the proper use of symbolism through the chaos of its frequent misuses. Modern psychology and philosophy have much to say about symbolism. In order to include later and on the whole broader definitions of symbols and their usages and in order to avoid oversimplification I have begun with a very general definition made by Alfred North Whitehead.

Symbols, then, are components of experience which elicit conscious responses of beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of experience. "The former set of components are the 'symbols' and the latter set constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols."¹ This association between symbol and meaning is indi-

icated by the root of the word itself. As far as this association is concerned it is important to note that a distinction can be made between three types: arbitrary association, descriptive association, and interpretative or insight association. Arbitrary association means that the symbol was chosen arbitrarily to suggest a meaning that the symbol itself does not describe, whereas descriptive association relates a symbol to its meaning which is also descriptive of that meaning. On the other hand interpretative association goes beyond the descriptive in that its symbolic meaning leads a glimpse into some higher reality beyond, not perceivable through sensory perception. It interprets. In other words the experience of such a symbol "is not for its own sake described and made vivid through the use of comparison drawn from other data of sense, as it is the case with descriptive symbol, but is given importance only as a gateway into something beyond. Such usage would make the symbol in some wise a semblance of a reality greater and truer than the symbol in all its aspects, a sort of initiation in which thought may be led through meaning to deeper meaning." As an example of arbitrary association

2. Symbol, from σύμβολον—συμβάλλειν, to put together (συμβάλλειν to throw together) -- to make something related to something else. The word also denotes the idea that symbols have no raison d'être of themselves; they exist only in relation to their meaning.


4. Ibid., p.7.
we could name most any emblem: the flag of the United States, the lion of St. Jerome, or the Cross of Christianity. By arbitrary association it is not meant that there is no reason for the association. The flag of the United States is arbitrary in that it has no descriptive value. The cross describes neither Christ nor Christianity. The high emotional value of an emblem such as a flag or a cross is due to the fact that these particular arbitrary symbols also evoke an interpretative association. Thus one object alone can also be illustrative of more than one type of symbolic association.

To illustrate the three different types of symbolic association we can use a tree as an example. The garden planer or architect who is in the process of laying out a garden marks the trees with an arbitrary symbol such as an X or a circle, or any symbol he might wish. To him this mark symbolizes a tree on his blueprint. Kilmer describes the tree in terms of sense experience. He describes its "leafy arms" and is thereby using the human body as a descriptive symbol of the tree. Lastly, the artist or poet can see more than just the botanically concrete in a tree and may look through it for deeper meanings, as Kilmer does in exclaiming over its natural beauty and realizing therein the handwork of the Creator: "Only God can make a tree."

Thus the tree itself has become an interpretative symbol representing the mystery and magnificence of creation.
All symbols can be classified under one or more of these three types of associations. As far as medieval symbolism is concerned we shall be interested only in the interpretative association. It is the medieval man who most of all could go out into his universe and see a tree symbolizing God's creation; a rock or a stick, by the way, could be just as symbolic. Before I discuss medieval symbolism in particular, however, I would like to point out some more general aspects about symbols and their use.

The basic characteristic of a symbol is its figurative quality. This means that the attitude aroused by the symbol has the associated meaning in view and not the symbol itself. What is more, that which is a symbol itself can in turn become symbolic of some higher meaning. Let us elaborate with Tillich's example: "Devotion to the crucifix is really directed to the crucifixion on Golgatha and devotion to the latter is in reality intended for the redemptive action of God, which is itself a symbolic expression for an experience of what concerns us ultimately." Thus the cross is not only a symbol of the historic event of the crucifixion, but also symbol of "what concerns us ultimately", and therefore gives us insight into a higher meaning.

Another characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. The symbol as opposed to sign has a necessary character which

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 76.
cannot be exchanged. "Words and signs originally had symbolic character. They conveyed the meaning which they expressed, with an inherent power of their own. In the course of evolution and as a result of the transition from the mystical to the technical view of the world, they have lost their symbolic character, though not entirely. Once having lost their innate power they become signs. The pictorial symbols of religious art were originally charged with magical power, with the loss of which they become a conventional sign-language and almost forfeited their genuine symbolic character." The symbolic power of the cross lies in its meaning. As soon as a Christian does not see beyond the cross to its meaning, he is no longer a truly Christian attitude, for to him the cross has lost the very essence of its symbolic power. The power of the symbol is directive. The loss of its directiveness means the loss of its symbolic nature. Does the Grail have such symbolic value? This will be the question which I shall attempt to answer in this study.

Another characteristic of the symbol is its acceptability as such. This implies, according to Tillich, that the "symbol is socially rooted and socially supported" which means that something only becomes a symbol when it is socially accepted as such. This infers that an individual cannot have symbols to himself. Even though a symbol may be created by an individual, the process by which it becomes a symbol is a social act.

8. Ibid. 
9. Ibid. 
10. Ibid.
The most fleeting glance at different periods of civilization discloses that there are great divergencies in attitudes toward symbolism. It is common knowledge that the Middle Ages represent an epoch when men's imaginations were dominated by their fascination with the symbolic. Art was symbolical, architecture was symbolical, philosophy and theology were symbolical. Originating from man's natural desire to find knowledge, the symbolic method was used indiscriminately, to the extent that a head-on search for hidden meanings in most anything led to colossal disaster. For by the end of the Middle Ages symbols were elevated above that which they symbolized and "scholars" found themselves in a labyrinth of confusion, because the distinction between 'meaning' and 'symbol' was no longer respected; the symbolic consequently became 'meaningless! With the Reformation a reaction set in. The worship of the Scientific Method began, the Symbolic Method was abolished almost entirely until recently\(^\text{11}\), and as Mrs. Dunbar says, "the world is only just beginning to rub the dust from its eyes and to look back, wondering if perhaps after all there may be something in the road behind it."\(^\text{12}\)

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11. Recently a modern school of philosophy in the footsteps of Alfred North Whitehead has developed under the leadership of Susanne Langer. Her books: *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art and Feeling and Form* deal with a new concept of symbolism. She says: "A new philosophical theme has been set forth to a coming age: an epistemological theme, the comprehension of science. The power of symbolism is its cue, as the finality of sense-data was the cue for a former epoch." -S. K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, (New York: 1948), p. 29.

In order to understand the medieval concept of symbolism, we must understand the medieval concept of the universe. Medieval man's outlook on the world in which he lived was uniquely simple and just as uniquely complex at the same time. Robin George Collingwood comments:

The men of the middle ages, as we look back on them, appear to us half children and half giants. In the narrowness of their outlook, the smallness of the problems they faced, their fanciful and innocent superstition, their combination of qualities and activities which a reflective or critical society would find intolerably contradictory, they are children, and it is difficult for us to believe that human beings could be so simple. But in the solid magnitude of their achievements, their systems of law and philosophy, their creation and organization of huge nation-states, their incredible cathedrals, and above all their gradual forging of a civilized world out of a chaos of barbarism, they seem possessed by a tenacity and a vastness of purpose that we can only call gigantic.  

This unique attitude of the man of the Middle Ages must be attributed to his unity of mind. No mental activity exists for him alone by itself. Art was always working hand in hand with religion, religion hand in hand with philosophy, and so on. There was no subordination of one profession to another; everything was intrinsically valuable in itself, since everything, however small, was a part of the unity of God's universe. Thus as Collingwood says, "The medieval mind feels itself surrounded, beyond the sphere of danger, by a great peace, an infinite happiness." This peace was evoked by his simple acceptance of God's Being throughout the universe. He lived in a society where all things pointed to God.

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Anything, everything can become a symbol of God, whether man was looking for it in the philosopher's stone, in alchemistic aspirations, in the Grail, or in chivalry. Anything, no matter what, is capable of standing automatically in relation to the Holy. It is naturally not the object being sought, but what it symbolizes which is valuable and worth questing for.

Medieval symbolism was cosmic. A stone could point toward God; a vessel could point toward Him; a tree could be the symbol of life eternal given by God... The medieval universe was sacramental and imbued with supernatural qualities. The Grail feeds people; the philosopher's stone turns metal into gold. To us such a concept of the universe is magical and superstitious. To the medieval mind this was not magic, but simply and complexly the way the world was.
II

THE STORY OF PERCEVAL

CHRETIEN'S VERSION

Chrétiens Perceval ou Le Conte del Graal is not only a romance relating the knightly adventures of Perceval, but also involves the knightly deeds of Gauvain. Indeed after verse 4747 the deeds of Gauvain are related exclusively (except for the episode of Perceval with his uncle on Good Friday) until verse 9234 where, according to most scholars Chrétiens work ends abruptly, supposedly because of his death. Since the Gauvain episodes upset the unity of the romance, the question has arisen, whether or not they are actually to be attributed to Chrétiens. Several scholars, among them Stephan Hofer, are of the opinion that the Gauvain romance was written by a continuator. However that may be, Perceval is definitely the main hero and the one who is destined to find the Grail. Therefore it is his life's story that we are interested in.

Chrétiens relates the events as seen through the eyes of Perceval which

gives it a flavor of added mystery. We are just as puzzled by the Grail and the Grail procession as he is and just as outdone with him as his cousin, when he does not ask the significance, for we too would like to know. Slowly, as the mystery reveals itself to Perceval, we, the readers, become more involved in this mysterious quest for the thing which is called the Grail.

Chrétien's story begins with Perceval's boyhood. His mother, a widow, has decided to bring up her youngest son, the only one she has left, in an isolated forest of Wales, hoping that he will never grow up to be a knight and go off and be killed as her husband and other sons were. Her plot, however, does not succeed, for one morning Perceval encounters five knights in a forest. Fascinated by them, he decides to go to King Arthur, who, as the knights have told him, will be able to make him a knight also. She lets him go with great reluctance in her heart, clothes him, and gives him awkward advice about his conduct with women, about seeking counsel with wise gentlemen, and about entering churches to pray. When he departs she falls into a swoon, but he continues on his way without turning back to help her. This is the first sin which he will have to pay for later.

He thinks he is following the advice of his mother when he enters into a beautiful tent which he has mistaken for a church and kisses a damsel there and goes off with her ring, leaving the maiden behind
with her jealous lover who, convinced of her infidelity, rejects her and forces her to ride forth in rags, so that everyone might see her shame. At the court of King Arthur he is rendered ridiculous by the knight Keu and praised by a damsel as the best knight in the world. He kills the Red Knight for having insulted King Arthur and his Queen and rides off with his armour in search of more adventure. In the castle of Gornemant he learns how to handle his new horse and arms, receives the order of knighthood, and receives wise counsel. He is told not to be too curious or loquacious, for this is not wise. This advice will bring him much sorrow. Thereafter Perceval seeks to return to his mother, but is caught up in a new adventure when he visits the castle of Blancheflor, the niece of Gornemant. She beseeches him for help against her enemies which are about to besiege the castle. Like a true knight he vanquishes them in little time and sends them as prisoners to King Arthur. Haunted by the image of his swooning mother, he leaves Blancheflor reluctantly, for in the mean time he has fallen in love with her. He promises to return, however, as soon as he has found news of his mother, but his return is delayed for many years, for the next day he comes to the Grail castle, and because he follows Gornemant's advice and does not ask concerning the Grail and whom it serves, a question which would have healed the suffering Fisher King from his misery, which would have brought happiness and prosperity to the land, and which would have made
him, Perceval, King of the Grail, he is condemned by his cousin, and later on the Hideous Damsel curses him. Hereafter he sets out on his supposedly impossible quest for the Grail. He vows not to sleep two nights in the same place till he has discovered the secret of the Grail.

Then the story continues with Gauvain's adventures with the King Cavalon and with the Maid of the Little Sleeves, while his mission to seek and bring back the bleeding lance which was a part of the Grail Procession which I will describe and discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Meanwhile Perceval wanders in search of the Grail Castle. He overcomes all perils, sends dozens of prisoners back to King Arthur's court, but oblivious of God, he has not entered into a church for five years, when on Good Friday he happens upon a group of pilgrims who chide him for wearing armour on the sacred day of Crist's crucifixion and direct him to a hermit in the woods who turns out to be his uncle, and who tells him that it was because of his sin in leaving his mother that this great misfortune has fallen upon him. Perceval remains with his uncle till Easter and repents of his sins.

Then he rides forth again in search of the Grail with renewed strength. He has been told many things concerning the Grail and knows that it will be only with the aid of God that he will ever find it. Whether Perceval was actually successful or not we do
not know for certain, for here Chrétien continues the story of Gauvain, never to come back to his hero Perceval. It is most probable that Chrétien's Perceval was destined to find the Grail Castle, to ask the question, thereby healing the Fisher King, and to become Grail King himself.

WOLFRAM'S VERSION

Wolfram's story is much the same as Chrétien's, except for the fact that Wolfram elaborates more on Parzival's background and boyhood and gives us more details concerning his genealogy. Wolfram also gives us another detail which throws a new and somewhat different light on the story. The young boy makes himself a bow and arrow one day and shoots a bird. Because of this deed the boy becomes very grieved. The sight of a bird now makes him cry. His mother wishing to alleviate his grief orders the birds killed. Parzival protests violently, and the mother quickly says:

"What right to thwart His will have I
Since He's the mighty God on high?
Should birds for my sake give up joy?"
Then said to her the little boy,
"O Mother, what is God, I pray?"

(W. P. vss. 119,13-119,17)

This question Parzival asks shows Wolfram's artistry in giving the

the reader a hint about the future events which foreshadow the climax of the story, for Parzival's life will be spent asking this question: "What is God?" and his quest is in reality a quest for God. Parzival's sin is his indecisiveness (zwîvel) about God, whereas Chrétien's Perceval is simply ignorant of the divine. As we shall see, Wolfram's hero's striving is a conscious questioning, whereas Chrétien's Perceval may be characterized by his simple good will to do that which he is told is right and set aright that which he is told he has done wrong. Thus the first events of his childhood demonstrate the different personalities which Chrétien and Wolfram give to their respective heroes.

From Book III of Parzival to Book XIII the episodes in Wolfram's work correspond closely to Chrétien's version. Wolfram places much less stress on Parzival's encounter with the four knights (Chrétien by the way has five). Wolfram also gives much less detail about Parzival's parting with his mother, and his descriptions of King Arthur's court are less vivid and colorful than are Chrétien's. Parzival does not remember his mother's anguish, even though she did fall into a swoon when he left her. This is an important divergence from Chrétien's version, for it is because of his treatment of his mother, as he is told later by the hermit, that he failed to ask the Grail question.

His motive for riding forth from his lovely wife Condwriramurs (coin de woire amour) is different from that of Chrétien's Parzival.
Parzival's main interest is to find adventure rather than to take care of his mother.

"To her I'll pay a visit brief
And then upon adventure go."

(W. P. 223, 22-23)

he says.

Thus he sets out. One evening he comes to a lake where a fisher attired in rich garments is fishing in a boat. The fisher directs Parzival to his castle, promising to be his host. Following his directions, Parzival comes to the glorious castle, and here Wolfram goes into much more detail than did Chrétien. Parzival is courteously received at the castle; he is fed with royal dishes; he is clothed in rich garments; ceremoniously he is presented with a sword. In great spendor the solemnity of the occasion is made clear. One element stands out above all the rest: that is the great sorrow which hangs over the whole occasion. This sadness and gloom seem to be in strange contrast to the luxury round about them. Wolfram carefully describes this mysterious gathering in glorious detail or light and color. The banquet-room, to which Parzival had been shown, is lighted by a hundred chandeliers, and around the walls there are a hundred couches. The host is carried into the room and is treated like a very sick man. When many knights have entered the hall a bleeding lance is carried in, whereupon every one present makes great lament, and the Grail Procession follows in profound solemnity.
Here Wolfram concentrates on the mystery of the Grail which I shall discuss in the following chapter. The guests reverently take all manner of food and wine from the Grail, and everything comes from its power.

As in Chrétien's version Wolfram's Parzival is just as bewildered by all these events. And yet, mindful of the old prince's counsel, he asks nothing. When he is presented with the sword he is given another opportunity to ask his ailing host what has stricken him. He does not, however, and soon he goes to bed to awake the next morning to a deserted castle. He comes upon his cousin again, whom Wolfram names Sigune. When she finds out what has happened, she curses him, and later on when Cundrie (who is the Hideous Damsel in Wolfram) rides up to the assembled court of King Arthur, she curses him also. Both curse him, not for having left his mother, but for having shown no compassion for the Grail King. (W. P. 255,17 and 316,3).

 Afterwards both Gawain and Parzival are challenged to combat. Gawain innocently wishes God's blessings on Parzival, whereupon Parzival exclaims:

   ..."Woe, what is God?
   Were He almighty, scorn so odd
   To thee and me He'd not have sent,
   If he had been omnipotent.
   To serve him e'er was in my mind,
   Since I had noped His grace to find.
   But now His service I foreshare,
   If me He hate, that hate I'll bear."
   (W.P. vss. 332,1-332,6)
Springer comments: "Wolfram underlines Parzival's relationship to God, while there is nothing comparable here or elsewhere in Chrétien, who only in retrospect makes Perceval admit his neglect of church services. In other words, Chrétien's Perceval is drifting away, unconsciously and passively, from the life of a good Christian, whereas Wolfram's Parzival is a rebel against God -- to be sure, not in the modern sense of denying the existence of God but rather of doubting His power and good will. Wolfram portrays for his medieval audience man's situation as between God and the devil, heaven and hell, good and evil..."

After an interlude where Gawain's adventures are related, we find Parzival on the way to the hermit when he meets his cousin Sigune for the third time. This time she forgives him and encourages him hopefully to find the Grail and God's forgiveness.

It is his uncle Trevrizent who reveals the mysteries of the Grail to Parzival. Wolfram gives us far more details about the origin of the Grail than did Chrétien. Trevrizent also explains Parzival's sin. Parzival finds out that when he slew the Red Knight Ither he had killed his own blood, for Ither was his cousin. His sin seems more serious now. He not only did not show compassion on the Grail King, but he also left his mother and caused her death, and now he finds out that he is also responsible for killing his cousin. Parzival now confesses these sins to his hermit uncle

and repents for everything that he has done amiss.

His adventures continue, and now he meets a heathen knight. They fight with swords, and Parzival is about to strike the heathen down when his sword -- once Ither's -- breaks. The foolish deed of Parzival in slaying Ither now seems atoned for by the breaking of the sword, for had it not broken, Parzival would have slain his brother, since it was Feirefiz his half-brother he had been about to kill. The brothers embrace joyfully, and the next day Feirefiz is made a knight of the Table Round by King Arthur. A grand tournament and a feast are held in his honor. While the great company is seated at the table there appears Cundrie as she had appeared once before. This time, however, she turns to Parzival and throws herself at his feet to beg forgiveness. Parzival forgives her willingly. She rises and exclaims:

"Thou'rt blest, of Gahmuret the son,  
God's gracious favor thou hast won.....  
....All hail!  
Thou'lt be the ruler o'er the Graill  
...For King Anfortas soon will hear  
Thy question asked, to bring him cheer  
And end his grievous suffering now--  
Who could be blissfuller than thou?"

(W.P. 781,3-4; 781,15-16; 781,27-782)

As Cundrie has said Parzival's quest is over:

"Peace of soul thou'st won in strife,  
Awaiting in sorrow the joys of life."

(W.P. 782,29-30)

Cundrie leads Parzival to the Grail Castle; he asks the question,
frees the suffering King, is reunited with his family, and his son
Lohengrin is named his successor as Grail King. Here ends the great
romance.

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It is very evident that many obscurities and mysteries are
present in both stories. The first question which I find necessary
to ask is whether or not these stories are in any way symbolic, and
if so when and where. It has been maintained that it is incorrect to
see anything beyond the usual courtly romance in this story.
The theme of the young man who slowly becomes wise to the ways of the
world and who, because he is a true knight, is able to help others and
free them from their miseries in the end is certainly a subject
which is typical of the roman courtois. In my opinion the English
Syr Percevelle which does not mention the Grail at all is entirely
and purely courtly romance. Perceval and Parzival, however, are more.
They have a fourth dimension which the courtly romance per se
has not. This fourth dimension is due to the complete "otherliness"
of the Grail episode and its meaning.

The whole drama springs from the fact that Perceval did not
ask the meaning of the Grail. This fact is considered a grave sin
by his cousin, by the Hideous Damsel and by his uncle, the hermit.
They all explain that it is because of his other sins such as leaving
his mother, killing Ither, and not having compassion that he did
not ask the Grail question. This is an entirely different type of
'sin' which we usually do not find in courtly literature. To
give a few examples from Chrétien's famous works we might mention the sins of Erec and Yvain. In Erec the hero's sin was to have been too recreant and to have loved too much to the point of forgetting his knightly duties. In Yvain the hero's sin is instead due to the fact that he forgot his duties of love, because of his feats of arms. The circumstances of Perceval's sins, however, are more peculiar and the consequences are more serious, having not only bad results for himself but for many others also. He is not only doomed to quest restlessly for more than five years, but he also causes the misfortune of a whole country, and is also responsible for the misery of the Fisher King, since it had been in his power to heal him. And yet all of this because he failed to ask one simple question, a question which he did not ask, because he had been told not to be overcurious!

We must concede that this is indeed a very strange matter, and any attempt to explain it in terms of the usual romance characteristics will necessarily be insufficient. In the final analysis the strangeness and 'otherliness' of the story is due entirely to the Grail. What is the Grail? What is the Grail Procession? What is its nature, its purpose, its meaning, its power? The answer, if there is one, will give the sought after interpretation of this strange romance. This answer will be sought in the next chapter.
The first time the Grail is described in any piece of literature we have today is in Chrétien's *Perceval* verse 3220. Chrétien's hero is at the Grail Castle, has sat down with his host, when a procession begins. First comes a vallet with a sword around his neck:

Lu(s) vallés entre apr la por(t)e
De la maison et si aporte
Une espee a son col pendue,
Si l'a al riche home rendue.
(Ch. P. vss. 3131-3134)

There follows a vallet with a white lance which bleeds a drop of blood:

Uns vallés d'un(e) chambre vint,
Qui une blanche lance tint....
Le lance blanche et le fer blanc,
S'issoit une goutte de sanc.
(Ch. P. vss. 3191-92;3197-98)

Then two vallets bring in chandeliers:

Atant diu autre vallet vindrent,
Qui candeliers en lor mains tindrent...
(Ch. P. vss. 3213-14)

Then the Grail is brought in by a maiden who is beautiful and
When she enters into the hall with the Grail there is such a bright light that the chandeliers lose their brightness as do the stars when the sun comes up:

Un graal entre ses deus mains
Une demoisele tenoit,
Qui avec les vallés venoit,
Bale et gente et bien accasme,
Quant ele fu laiens entree
Atot le graal qu'ele tint,
Une si grans clartez i vint
0 li ansi perdierent les chandoiles
Lor clarté come les estoiles
Font quant solans lieve ou la lune.

(Ch. P. 3220-29)

This poetical metaphor comparing the Grail with the sun in its brightness is significant and I shall refer to it later on. After the Grail a maiden enters with a silver platter (tailleur d'argant) which as Ehrismann suggests could have been a kind of saucer for the Grail. It is made of fine gold and is set with many precious stones, in fact the most precious stones which might be found in the sea or on land:

Li graaus, qui aloit devant
De fin or esmeré estoit;
Precieuses pierres avoit
El graal de maintes manieres,
Des plus riches et des plus chieres
Qui en mer ne en terre soient;
Totes autres pierres passoient
Coles del graal sanz dotance.

(Ch. P. vss. 3232-39)

After this description Chrétien tells us that the Grail

is carried from one room to another, and that it is carried around while Perceval and his host eat:

Et li graals endemiers
Par devant als retraspasa.
(Ch. P. vss. 3290-91)

Chrétien now goes on to describe the other events in the Grail Castle and the Grail is left a mystery. All we know is that it is a very precious object ornamented with precious stones, that it is comparable in brightness to the sun, that it remains in constant motion, that it serves someone, but Perceval does not ask whom, and that it is carried by a very fair maiden.

When Perceval meets his cousin soon afterwards in the forest he relates the strange events at the Grail Castle. She in turn gives us another clue as to the mystery of the Grail. She tells him that if he had asked whom the Grail served he would have healed the ailing king:

Ha! Perchevax malefïrous
Quant tu tot che n'as demandé!
Que tant eûsses amendé
Le buen roi qui est mehaigniez
Que toz eûst regaaigniez
Ses membres et terre tenist
Et si graus biens t'en evenist!
(Ch. P. vss. 3583-90)

Thus, as I have already mentioned, the asking about the Grail has some mysterious healing power.
The Hideous Famsel, who rides up on her mule and curses Perceval in front of the assembled court of King Arthur, tells Perceval the same thing and adds that, because he did not ask about the Grail, not only did he fail to heal the Fisher King but he will also bring great sorrow, for ladies will lose their husbands, lands will be ravaged, maidens will be disconsolate and will become orphans, and many knights will die for it:

Dames en perdront lor maris,
Terres en seront escillies
Et pucesles desconseillies,
Qui orfenines remandront,
Et maint chevalier en mourront;
Tot cist mal esteron par toi,

(Ch. 7. vss. 4678-83)

As we see here, the whole thing has become much more serious. Not only does his failure to ask the Grail question cause the King to remain in pain, but it also brings misfortune on the land and its inhabitants.

The last mention of the Grail is made when Perceval comes to his uncle the hermit. It is he who actually tells Perceval whom they serve with the Grail. He tells him that the one they serve with the Grail is his brother, therefore Perceval's uncle who is the brother also of his mother. The Fisher King is his son, therefore Perceval's cousin. Of the Grail he says that it does not contain pike nor lamprey nor salmon, but a single host which is the only thing that sustains and comforts his life:
Furthermore the hermit says that the Grail King is such a spiritual man (esperitax - vs. 6426) that the one host of the Grail is all that is needed to sustain his life. The statement that Perceval should not believe that the Grail contains salmon or lamorey implies that the Grail was actually big enough to do so and that it either looked like a receptacle for fish or that at some time or other it was made to hold fish in some version of the legend.  

In summary, according to Chrétien, the Grail was a very precious object studded with precious stones and brighter than all the candles put together. Large enough to hold fish it contained the single wafer of the mass. Its power was to sustain the life of the Grail King. But there are more mysteries connected with it which Chrétien did not care to elaborate, for failure to ask the Grail question results in the misfortune of Perceval, keeps the ailing King from getting well, causes misfortune on all the land. Thus the knowledge of the Grail and whom it serves has magical powers to

keep or bring prosperity to the land, as it already sustains
the life of the Grail King. Moreover, Chrétien himself calls it
a "tant sainte chose", that is if Chrétien wrote this passage at
all, which Brown claims he did not. Brown argues that Chrétien
would have said that it contained the host earlier had he written
this passage, and that he was too great an artist to describe
the Grail in a purely secular setting and then to change it into
something holy. The only way that Chrétien could be said not to
have identified the Grail with the Christian Mass, is to prove that
vss. 6413-6425 represent an interpolation. This Brown
attempts to do by comparing the different Perceval manuscripts
to find one where the "oiste" is not mentioned. This he finds in
the prose version Perlesvaus which is dated to the period between
1191 and 1212, the year 1191 being fixed by exhumation, and 1212
being the appropriate time for the dedication to Jean de Nesle
mentioned in the colophon of the second redaction. The ms.
was printed in 1530. In this version, of which Chrétien's Le
Conte del Graal is generally considered a source, no mention
is made at this particular place of the Grail containing the
host. This argument of Brown's seems hardly convincing to me.
First of all I do not think that it is contrary to poetic artistry
for Chrétien to have mentioned the host only later on in his
work. He was describing something mysterious through Perceval's

3. Ibid., p. 227
4. William Albert Nitze, "Perlesvaus", Arthurian Literature
   in the Middle Ages, p. 268.
5. Ibid., p.267.
eyes. Perceval did not see more in the Grail than that which Chrétien described, we know Perceval was puzzled by it, for Chrétien explicitly says so (vss. 3001-3). He obviously did not get to see what was in it. Another reason that Chrétien might have described the Grail in vss. 3220-3291 and vss. 3583-3590 without mentioning the host, is that he might have thought thereby to maintain an atmosphere of mystery and awe around the object which he wanted to heighten rather than destroy. Secondly I do not think that the fact that the Perlesvaus ms. does not contain a mention of the "oiste", while it has almost the exact wording of Chrétien's passage in everything else, means that the Perlesvaus by the anonymous prose writer did not mention the "oiste" because the Grail was not to be identified with the Mass. For he very definitely connects the Grail with the Mass elsewhere. In fact King Arthur sets out one day to find the Grail himself, and he finds it during the Mass: "When Arthur finally beholds the Grail during the consecration of the Mass, it appears in five shapes or nuances, the last of which is that of a chalice."6 I think it is therefore impossible to base an argument against Chrétien's authorship of verse 6422 on this manuscript alone, especially since so many other manuscripts

6. Ibid., p. 266.
have "oiste". If someone had made a later interpolation, wishing to further christianize the romance it is unlikely that 12 out of 15 mss. would happen to have the same interpolation. The fact that the Grail Procession is very reminiscent of secular and pagan elements does not exclude that Chrétien thought of the Grail itself as a Christian object.

If then, we have established that Chrétien indeed wrote vs. 6422, we can say that Chrétien's concept of the Grail is Christian, since it contains the "oiste". This does not mean, however, that Chrétien actually identified the Grail with the Mass. In fact he obviously did not. The Mass is conducted in church by ordained priests, whereas Chrétien has the Grail in a castle, carried by valets and young maidens. Chrétien's meal is not a religious event, but is a knightly feasting, subdued of course by the presence of great sorrow and the suspense provided by the fact that we do not know whether Perceval will in the end ask the question or not. Obviously there are elements present in the Grail Procession which are secular and pagan and which are reminiscences.

7. Wolfram has "oiste", the Flemish version has "oiste", the Potvin edition has "oiste", the Cangé edition has "oiste". All mss. have it except ms. "P" which has "D'une sole dist li saint hon", and "P" "D'une sale ce est li sains hom". The Prose as mentioned above by Brown has: "...par la vertu que en luy est seulement eb le Roy Peshor soubstient sa vie...". (The text comparisons were made by Sister Maria Aloysia Rachbauer, op. cit., p. 237)
cent of ancient and celtic ritual.

There are many scholars who would trace the origin of the Grail legend back to pagan sources entirely. Weston firmly believes that the root of the legend lies in ancient Ritual, with the objective of this Ritual being the initiation into the secret of life, both physical and spiritual. Loomis believes that their ultimate sources lay in Irish sagas, where visits of pagan gods to mortal heroes were told, where they feasted sumptuously from so-called vessels of plenty. These sagas then passed on to the Welsh and the original characters were replaced. One of the principal themes was the deliverance of a Waste Land through the cure of a wounded king. This heterogeneous material was then transmitted orally through the Bretons to the French and Anglo-Normans. Hereafter poets trying to make sense out of the confusion found some Christian points of departure, supposedly mistaking "cors beneiz" the blessed horn of plenty for the Corpus Christi "corps beneiz", thereby eventually making it the chalice of the Lord's Supper. Soon the maimed king was identified with Joseph of Arimathea, custodian of the body of Christ, notably by Robert de Boron.

Even this theory leaves many loose threads. One very thin one by which the whole process of Christianization seems to be dangling is the misunderstanding of "cors". However plausible

the theories might seem, we cannot be certain about any of them.

The source question is obviously a very crucial one. For if the Grail actually is a horn of plenty its symbolic value will be changed. Since the origin of the Grail is uncertain, the only possible symbolical interpretation must be derived from the works themselves. There are still many elements in the account of the Grail, however, which remain incongruous within the works themselves,\(^{10}\) which must be attributed to the fact that the Grail is a mixture of several sources.\(^{11}\)

Ehrismann sums up the problem with insight. He says: "Ver-einzel t sind keltische Sagenzüge in die literarischen Denkmäler der Sage eingedrungen, aber sie bilden nicht den Ausgangspunkt. Zur Verbindung mit irgendwelchen Mythen oder orientalischen Kulten fehlt jeder historische Zusammenhang. Aus Roberts und auch aus Chrestiens Auffassung geht dagegen mit Sicherheit hervor, dass die Gralsage auf christlichen Vorstellungen beruht: die neuen Christen Joseph's von Arimathia und die heiligen Geräte, die sie

10. To give some examples of the contradictions within Chrétien's work itself I shall quote the following passage by Albert Pauphilet \textit{Légendes du moyen âge}, (Melun: 1950), p. 183, trans. by Dr. Loomis in the "Origin of the Grail Legends", in \textit{Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages}, op. cit., p. 276:

The old maimed king who would have been cured by a magic question, was not, apparently, the only lord of the marvellous castle, nor the only invalid. For the other invalid, his unseen father, since he had not left his chamber for fifteen years, must have been even more of a cripple than the Fisher King. Would he also have been healed by Perceval's question? But there is never a hint of this. And how can all this be reconciled with the story which Chrétien himself has told? The old man is kept alive by a single wafer which is brought to him in the graal: nevertheless, with each new course the graal has reappeared and passed into his chamber. Why these repeated servings of 'une seule oiste'? Moreover, a mass wafer ought not to have been placed in
bewahren, sind ein Abbild der Abendmahlgemeinde und -feier. Roberts Josephlegende ist eine Umsetzung der Messliturgie in eine historische Legende, Chrestiens Roman eine märchenhafte dichterische Verweltlichung des segenspendenden Kelches, seiner Wunder und seiner Pfleger.¹²

The last sentence is very important for us to keep in mind while searching for the symbolical implications of Chrétien's work: "Chrétien's romance is a fairy-tale-like poetical secularization of the blessed chalice, of its wonders and its keepers." Whether like Ehrismann we believe that the Christian interpretation of the Grail was the original one, and that pagan elements crept in as they did very frequently, or whether we believe like Loomis that the pagan sources were the original, the consequences for this study are the same. For in this study to arrive at any symbolical interpretation whatsoever, we must take both pagan and Christian elements into account and which one is the original does not change its

any but a liturgical vessel: behold then the graal transformed by sleight of hand into a ciborium or a chalice, and this singular procession transformed into the beginning of a Christian liturgy. But then, what do these unusual accessories mean, this lance, and above all the absence of a priest? It is a young damsel, beautifully clad, who holds the graal, 'tant sainete chose'. In reality, these interpretations are artificial and do not harmonize at all with the beginning of the poem. They imply that a transformation has been wrought which has completely altered the original theme.

11. See page 44 for a schematical drawing of the various sources of the Grail.
SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE DIVERSE ORIGINS OF THE GRAIL

Primitive Sun Worship

Primitive Jewish Monotheism

Roman + Greek Pantheism

Oriental Mystery Cults

Christianity

Mixture of these concepts in Roman Empire

Tradition of Early Church Lord's Supper Chalice

Stone in the Temple of Solomon

Stone of Phoenix

Moses, Philosophers Stone

Celtic Cauldron of Plenty

Arabic Meteoric Stone

Mysterious Vessel

Graal, Graus, Gral, Graux, Graalz, Gزال

Graal
symbolic content.

It is difficult to be certain as to what Chrétien's Grail symbolizes. This is true not only because symbolism is such an elusive thing, but also because Chrétien was never able to tell the final outcome of Perceval's quest. From the hermit's words we might gather that he will be successful, for he says to Perceval:

\begin{verbatim}
Ce weil que por tes pechiez faces,
Se rervoir vous totes tes graces
Issi com tu avoir les sens.
Or me di se faire le vels,
Cil, sire, molt volontiers.
\end{verbatim}

\textit{(Ch. P. 6471-74)}

It is implied that to "ravoir totes tes graces" Perceval was to find the Grail.

Whether he achieved his goal or not, it is Perceval's striving, his quest which is important. The main external object of the quest was the restoration to health and vigor of a suffering king whose infirmity for some unexplained reason had a disastrous effect upon his kingdom. As such Perceval's quest was entirely altruistic, however in that he was to find his own peace were he to find the Grail, his quest is also personal. Because knowledge of the Grail was the object of his quest, the Grail in some measure became symbolic of the quest. In that his quest was unsuccessful until he had repented for his sins and found God again, the quest is not
just a search for the meaning of the Grail, but also a search for God, although Perceval did not realize this right away. Hence the Grail being a symbol of his quest, and the quest being a quest for God, the Grail has become a symbol of Perceval's quest for God. Several factors can serve to confirm this point.

First of all the atmosphere of the poem, although there are many pagan elements as we have already mentioned, is largely Christian. As Cohen remarks, Chrétien is approaching death, and his thoughts are occupied with the life that is to come. At the end of his century man was approaching a more mystical outlook on life led by the influence of the cistercian monks. Chrétien has certainly placed more emphasis on religious insights in this work than he did in his other poems. Evidence of this stronger religious emphasis is found in Perceval's mother's advice to visit the churches (vss. 547-574); Gornemant's advice later on (vss. 1642-50); and it is especially evident throughout Perceval's encounter with the hermit on Good Friday. We think here of the significance of the Pascal season when Perceval's repentance and confession take place. We think about the sacred things the hermit reveals to Perceval about the Grail. It is therefore very possible that Chrétien actually looked on the quest of Perceval as a quest for God; in any event his hearers and his continuators thought he did.

Many things about the Grail's nature and its mysteries point toward God. It is the most precious thing the author knows how to describe. The most precious thing that exists as far as the Christian is concerned is heaven, God's presence. The Grail outshines all the candles in the room and seems to have a light of its own, a characteristic which reminds us of Old and New Testament descriptions of God as the source of all light, and the glorious light which is the way of God. The Grail's power of sustaining life is its function, as it is God's function as the all-sustaining Creator.

The asking about the Grail brings the attainment of its kingdom which means life and prosperity. The failure to ask brings desolation and death. These are precisely the Judeo-Christian concepts of the consequences awaiting man who has the alternative to either accept or reject God.

It seems possible, even probable, that the Grail can be regarded as a symbol of the beauty, of the life-sustaining powers, of the light and glory of heaven. He who quests for this light of heaven will find God. In the chapter on symbolism I pointed out that the medieval concept of symbolism was different from our present idea about it, in that everything in the medieval universe could be symbolically made to point toward God.

Does the Grail then fulfill the characteristics of a symbol?
In other words does it have directive power, is it figurative, is it socially accepted as a symbol in Perceval? If the Grail can be said to point toward God, then its power is directive. And if it does not exist for itself, but its raison d'être is its very pointing toward God, then it is figurative. Here arises a question about symbols in general. Can an object do something as well as be symbolic of something? I believe it can. Since it is the characteristic of the symbol that it exists only for its meaning, it would be true in that the Grail sustains life and contains the wafer, that the Grail therefore is not a symbol at all. Here, however, is where a distinction must be made between the object Grail and the function of the Grail. It is its function, its power which is symbolic, not the object Grail qua Grail. This explains somewhat why Wolfram's Grail can have a completely different form and yet symbolize the same thing. The shape and form, whether chalice, vessel, or stone, does not bear the symbolic import of the Grail. As to the question of its social acceptance as a symbol I must answer yes and no. When Perceval goes to the Grail Castle the first time he does not see the Grail as a symbol, because he has not been initiated into its meaning. Obviously the only way he could have been initiated is by asking the question, for by some ruling the Grail keepers are not allowed to reveal its mystery unless the one to be initiated makes the first effort. Only gradually does the Grail become a symbol to
him. His cousin, the Hideous Damsel, and the hermit all gradually instruct him as to the importance of the Grail. First, after his encounter with his cousin, the Grail becomes a symbol of his failure. Only after the Hideous Damsel has cursed him does it become the object of his quest, and then it is a symbol of what he has to do to set his failure aright. Only after his meeting with the hermit and after his confession and repentance does the Grail take on its ultimate value.

These three symbolic interpretations also illustrate the fact that which is a symbol already can in turn become symbolic of some higher meaning. In the final analysis it points toward God. The three symbolic levels correspond to three levels of action within the story: the psychological, the moral, and the religious. Frappier has pointed out these three different levels of action. The first level is an apprenticeship of the naïve Perceval in the deeds of chivalrous virtue. It is the psychological level where the naïveté of Perceval is sufficient to explain the silence of Perceval in the Grail Castle and thus his failure.

A second level of action is above all a moral drama which reaches its climax when, encountered by the Hideous Damsel, Perceval asserts his liberty of choice and strikes out on his quest. The third level which remains hidden at first, which is slowly revealed to him through experience, and fully revealed to him on Good Friday, is the religious level of experience. Deserted by
divine grace, and ignorant of sin and repentance, he finds spiritual salvation in the end.  

Frappier continues:

Compris comme un symbole, le Graal se trouve en correspondance avec chacun de ces trois plans. Le passage du cortège illustre la nicité, plaisante et tragique à la fois, de Perceval, sa ferveur toute dépensée à joir des émerveillements que lui procure un prestigieux décor de vie chevaleresque. Plus tard la nostalgie du Graal est le levain de sa liberté intérieure. Enfin, l'image d'un Graal eucharistique, ou de suggestion eucharistique, coïncide avec la rénovation religieuse du héros.

In comparison to Perceval, Gauvain, whom we have almost entirely omitted from this discussion, never attained this third level of religious experience. He also has been summoned on a quest by the Hideous Damsel, but his quest is entirely in the moral realm of chivalrous virtue and deeds. He quests for the bleeding lance, but not out of conviction or conscience, but because it has been imposed on him as a ransom to bring back the bleeding lance (vss. 6074-76). Perhaps a lance, although it too is shrouded in mystery and bleeds eternally, has more connection with Gauvain's kind of chivalry than does the Grail.

It is obvious that Perceval's quest is on a higher level. His function as the main hero, his connection with the Grail, his character all point toward Chrétien's higher conception of Perceval's destiny. His destiny lies in his quest for the Holy Grail, symbolically in his quest for God. The outcome of the

14. Jean Frappier, op. cit., pp. 185-186
15. Ibid.
quest is uncertain, and it is regrettable that Chrétien could not complete his romance. We would have been able to be much more definite about the symbolic value of the Grail and the symbolic value of the entire poem. And yet it might be less enticing, for part of the charm of Chrétien's romance lies in the fact that we can let our imaginations improvise: to how he might have finished it. It was obviously a great temptation (to improvise, that is) for his continuators! Perhaps it is because Chrétien never finished it that so many medieval authors took up their pens to write about the Grail. It is conceivable that Wolfram might not have written his Parzival if Chrétien's work had been a perfected masterpiece.
Wolfram's description of Parzival's arrival at the Grail Castle is very similar to Chrétien's. He too witnesses a strange procession. First a lance is brought in and all who are present are saddened by the sight and weep:

ein knappe spreng zer tür dar ín,
der truac eine gleevín;
der site was ze trúren guot,
an der sníden huop sich bluot
und lief den schaft umz für die hant,
das ez in dem ermel widerwant,
dâ wart geweinet und geschríf
uf dem pélase wít,
dez vole von drfzeč lenden
mühtezen den ougen niht enbländen.
(W. P. 231,17-26)

Following this two attendants (maids) enter carrying golden candlesticks. Two other ladies dressed in brown enter the hall carrying an ivory trestle upon which four other women place a granite table top before the host (vss. 232,25-233,1-3; 233,20-24). Then four other maidens appear with more candles. Then eight other maidens arrive dressed in green. Then six more maidens enter making a total of twenty-four, after them the Queen Repanse de Schoie, who is dressed in Arabian silk, enters carrying the Grail on green silk:

1. It is possible that Wolfram might have attached a symbolic value to the color of the dresses of the Grail maidens. The green color replacing the brown which has gone before reminds me of the ancient rituals of the coming of spring where symbolically the brown of the fall was replaced by the green and the freshness of spring. The idea of rebirth and resurrection connected with this is surely significant.
Nach den kom diu Königin,
ir antlize gap den schön,
si wänden alle, ez wolde tagen
man sach die maget an ir trägen
phellet von Arabi.
Üf einem grünen schmädi
truoc si den wunsch von pardis,
beide wurzeln unde rüs:
dez was ein ding, das hiez der gräl,
erden wünsches überwal.
Repance de Schoie si hiez,
die sich der gräl tragen liez.
der gräl was von solher art,
wol musote ir kiusche sin bewart,
diu sin ze rehte solde phlegen;
diu muoste valsches sich bewegen.
(W. P. vss. 235,15-30)

Here Wolfram tells us a lot about the Grail. He does not
describe it however; he says: "There was a thing which was called
the Grail" (vs. 235,23). He calls it the "wunsch von pardis",
"the wish of paradise", a very important specification for the
evaluation of its meaning. He also says that it outdoes all
earthly wishes. Does this mean that we are concerned here with a
spiritual value, or does it mean that the Grail is the finest
thing the earth has to offer? Also the one who carries the
Grail is of such a nature that she who keeps it must be pure, in
fact to be in the service of the Grail one must abstain from all
falsehood (vss. 235,29-30).

The Grail was then set down before the host (in Chrétien the
Grail was continually moved about). Then Wolfram goes on to say
that the Grail served more than a hundred knights in the hall.

2. It is possible that Wolfram might have attached some symbolic
value to the numbers involved in the Grail Procession. The fact
that the hall is square and that there are a hundred knights in it
and the fact that with Repance de Schoie there are twenty-five
Grail maidens may be significant here. I have not been able to
go into the symbolic use of numbers in Parzival which would have
certainly been an interesting study.
Whatever each one wanted, that was granted readily by the Grail:

\[
\begin{align*}
die &\text{ giengen al zemâle} \\
und &\text{ teilten vür die taveln sich,} \\
man &\text{ sagete mir, diz sage oouch ich} \\
\text{Ôf iuwer ieliches eit,} \\
daz &\text{ vor dem grâle waere bereit} \\
(\text{sol ich des iemen trieugen,} \\
\text{aô miegir ir mit mir liegen),} \\
zwâ &\text{ nâch jener bût die hent,} \\
daz &\text{ er al bereite vant} \\
spîse &\text{ warm, spîse kalt,} \\
spîse &\text{ niuwe und dar zuo eit,} \\
daz &\text{ zam und daz wilde.} \\
(\text{W. P. vss. 238,6-17})
\end{align*}
\]

And then Wolfram makes a very important statement: "The Grail", he says, "was the fruit of 'saelden', the sweetness of the world, it was very much like the characteristics which men attribute to heaven's realm:"

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wan der grâl was der saelden vruht,} \\
\text{der werlde sîeze alsolt genuht,} \\
\text{er wac vil nâch gelîche,} \\
\text{als man setget von himelîche.} \\
(\text{W. P. vss. 238,21-24})
\end{align*}
\]

When Parzival happens upon Sigune, his cousin, the inaccessibility of the Grail Castle is emphasized. She says that the one who seeks it will not find it. It must be done unwittingly for anyone to find it:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wan ein burc diu stêt al ein,} \\
\text{diust erden wünsches rîche.} \\
\text{swer die suochet vilîzegliche,} \\
\text{leider der evindet ir nîht:} \\
\text{vil liute manz doch werben siht,} \\
\text{ez muoz unwissende geschehen,} \\
\text{swer immer sol die burgeschen.} \\
(\text{W. P. 250,24-30})
\end{align*}
\]

The Ninth Book is the very core of Wolfram's work where

3. 'saelden' means holy bliss expressing somewhat the modern word 'Seligkeit'.
2,100 lines are dedicated to Parzival's encounter with the hermit Trevrizent (which is almost seven times the length of the corresponding section in Chrétien (vss. 6217-513). On the way to the hermit Parzival meets Sigune who encourages him this time to find the Grail and gives him advice to follow Cundrie who brings food from the Grail to Sigune every Saturday night. She says that God will help him:

un helfe dir des hant, dem alle kummer ist bekant, ob dir sê wol selinge, daz dich ein sê dar bringe, aldê ðu Musalvaesche sihs. (W. F. vss. 442,9-13)

When Parzival comes to Trevrizent he admits that he is grieved because of the Grail. He does not yet admit that he has failed to ask the question. Trevrizent readily reveals the mysteries of the Grail to him. Here Wolfram mentions Kyot again, saying that Kyot found the manuscript set down in heathen writing. It is good according to Trevrizent that Kyot had been baptized, or this tale would not have been known, for no heathen arts have been able to give the power of interpretation of the mysteries of the Grail.

ez half, daz in der touf was bi: anders waere diz maere noch unvernommen, dehein heidnisch list möhte uns gevromen ze kûden um des grâles art, wie men sîner tougen innen wart. (W. F. vss. 453,18-22)

Trevrizent goes on to describe the origin of the Grail. Flegetanis read its name in the stars and saw that a host of

neutral angels left it here on earth with innocent men who must be free of sin to guard it. When Parzival tells of his yearning for the Grail Trevrizent reveals to him that only the one who has been appointed to find the Grail will succeed. This agrees with what Sigune has told him earlier. Trevrizent goes on to offer Parzival information about the Grail. He says many warriors dwell at Munsalvaesch who are templars. They feed themselves by a wondrous stone which is pure and is called "lapsit exillis". One power of this stone is to burn the Phoenix to ashes to make it shine again as bright as day. The Phoenix is accepted as a symbol of the resurrection. The stone can also heal. Let a man be ailing, and he will not die as long as the stone is in sight. The presence of the stone also provides agelessness. No man or maid will grow old in its presence. He then concludes by saying: "This is the stone men call the Grail" (vs. 469,28).

```
der wirt sprach: "mir ist wol bekant,
ez vont mane weilichen hant
ze Munsalvaesche bê dem grâl,
durch ãventiur die die alle mâl
ritent mange reise.
die selben templeise,
swâ si kummer oder prîs bojagent,
vûr ir sünde si daz tragent.
dâ vont ein weilichen schar.
ich wil in künden um ir nar:
si lebent von einem steine,
des geslette ist vil reine.
hât ir des niht erkennet,
der wirt in hie genennet:
er heizet lapsit exillîs,
von des steines kraft der fênis
verbrennet, daz er zaschen wirt:
diu asche im aber leben birt.
sus rôftr der fênis müze sîn
und gît der nàch vil liehten schîn,
```
Thus Wolfram's Grail is a stone. He calls it *lapis exillis*. Springer comments: "Much has been written about the meaning and the origin of this name, which, as the variant forms of the manuscript indicate, *lapis, lapis* and *erillis, exillis, exillix, exilix*, bewildered the medieval scribes no less than modern commentators. If we add to these readings, the emendations proposed in more recent years, such as *lapis berillis, berillis, textilis, lapis ex celis, lapis electrix* or *elixir*, we can understand the present trend of assuming that several functions and hence several names have emerged in this miraculous stone."  

Most mss. have *lapis exillis*. The most satisfactory explanation, according to Springer, of the Grail stone has been given by Ehrismann and elaborated by Ranke and Krogmann, namely that Wolfram was influenced by a well-known passage in *Iter Alexandri Magni ed Paradisum*, where a stone (*lapis*) is described as being sent to the great conqueror from the Earthly Paradise.  

believes that Wolfram thought of the stone as a symbol of humility, since humility is so greatly stressed in the Iter Alexandri Magni, and since Wolfram stresses the importance of humility for the one who would possess it. He believes that Wolfram purposely substituted the stone for Chrétien’s grail, and recalled its origin when he refers to the Grail twice as a "wunsch von pardis" (vss. 235, 21; 470, 14).\footnote{11}

Lapidary symbols have always been used in both pagan and Christian ritual. Several scholars have sought to identify Wolfram’s stone with the Stone Kaaba of Mecca or the stone of the temple of Solomon.\footnote{12}

Margaret Richey\footnote{13} and Palgen\footnote{14} mention the possibility of the Philosopher’s Stone. The \textit{lapis electrum} associated with the burning and resurrection of the phoenix must not be ruled out.\footnote{15}

It is very possible that Wolfram’s Grail is a product of several converging symbols.\footnote{16} The altar-stone of the sacrament, meteor stone of Mohammedan lore, alchemist’s stones... all could have influenced Wolfram’s choice. There is value in each suggested origin, and, when each one is pursued, fantastic connections are found which cannot be proven.\footnote{17}

All possible explanations of Wolfram’s Grail do have an oriental strain of the legend at their source and agree to that extent.\footnote{18}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{11}{Ibid.}
\footnote{12}{\textit{Ehrismann}, op. cit., p. 252.}
\footnote{13}{Margaret Richey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 199.}
\footnote{14}{Rudolf Palgen, \textit{Der Stein der Weisen}, Quellenstudien zu Parzival, (Breslau: 1922).}
\footnote{15}{Zacher: \textit{Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie}, xxv, p. 380, quoted Richey, \textit{Ibid.}}
\footnote{16}{See p. 44 for schematical drawing of various Grail sources.}
\footnote{17}{Paul Hagen in \textit{Der Gral}, (Strassburg: 1900) pursues Mohammedan connections. Ludwig E. Iselin in \textit{Der morgenländische Ursprung der Grallegenden}, (Halle/S.: 1909) pursues oriental sources.}
\footnote{18}{Margaret Richey, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 199.}
\end{footnotes}
Trevrizent continues by saying that a message comes to the Grail every Good Friday which demonstrates its highest power: "dar ûf kunt hiute" (today because the encounter with Trevrizent takes place on Good Friday) "ein botschaft, / dar an doch lizet ein hoeste kraft". (vss. 469,29-30). For on this day a dove descends from heaven to lay the host upon the Grail: "ein tûbe von himele swinget, ûf den stein diu bringet/ eine kleine wiße oblå, ûf dem steine si die lât." (vss. 470,3-6). Thus the power of the Grail comes from heaven. Moreover, those who are ordained to the Grail are indicated mysteriously by the Grail itself, in that a mysterious writing appears on one end of the Grail-stone bearing the name of those who have been chosen by heaven to serve the Grail: "zende an des steines drum/ von karztten ein epitafium/ saget sînen namen und sînen art" (vss. 470,23-25). Those who are chosen will expect rewards in heaven, for when they die perfection awaits them in heaven: "vor sündenbaren schanden/ sint si immer mør behuot/ und wirt ir lôn ze himele guot:/ svenne in erstirbet hie daz leben, sô wirt in dort der wunsch gegeben" (vss. 471,10-14). It is the so-called neutral angels who serve the Grail, that is those who stood neither on Lucifer's nor on the Trinity's side: "die newederhelp gestuonden,/dô strîten begunden/ Lucifer und Trînîtes,/ suaz der selben engel wass,/ die edeln und die werden / muosten ûf die erden /zuo dem selben steine" (vss. 471,15-21). Now whether Wolfram really meant that neutral
angels, that is to say angels nevertheless, were to serve the Grail or whether "neutral angels" is just a symbolic term for man we do not know. However, I think that Wolfram meant man by 'neutral angels', for it was not uncommon to specify that man's life on earth is drawn back and forth between Lucifer and God, especially since Wolfram stresses this factor of Parzival's existence between light and darkness, when in the beginning he describes him as neither white nor black but grey and possessed by "zwiefel" a word which contains the dualism of his existence -- (zwei-fel). Also Parzival was no angel, and yet he became the king of all those who serve the Grail. 19

Little by little we learn more and more about the Grail and its mysteries and powers. Another attribute it has is its strange weight. It weighs so much, according to Trevrizent, that no wicked race can ever carry it away. Repanse de Schoie, however, who is Parzival's aunt as Trevrizent tells him, seems to carry it with ease: "Repanse de Schoie phliget/ des grâles, der sô swaere wiget/ dez in diu valschlich mennescheit/ nimmer von der stat getreit" (vss. 477,15-18). It seems that the stone is lighter for those who are pure in heart. Here we might see another symbolic value in that the weight of the stone corresponds to the gravity of the bearer's sins.

19. I have been disappointed not to find a single scholar who mentions this possibility. Most accept the fact that those who serve the Grail are angels. Zeydel and Morgan stress the luke-warmness in Rev. 3:15-16 which made it necessary for God to reject those who remain neutral. In Dante the neutral angels hover between heaven and hell. They do not seem worthy of keeping an object as precious as the Grail. In my opinion Wolfram could not have meant the neutral angels of Dante. The idea of neutral angels contradicts what Wolfram
Finally in the end, after more than five years of questing and suffering, Parzival is made King of the Grail. The insignia on the Grail indicate his name as successor (vs. 792,29); the planets are in such a position as to proclaim him King of the Grail (vs. 748,13-27). The wounded Fisher King is at last permitted to die and to be released from his suffering, and Parzival, his nephew takes over as the King of the Grail. Parzival is reunited with his wife Condwiramur, and they are led to the Grail Castle by Cundrie.

When the new Grail King and his queen arrive at Munsalvaessch preparation is made to greet the Holy Grail. At the high festivities the Grail is displayed, otherwise it is never shown. The last time it was shown in grief to Parzival in the hope that he would ask the question; this time it is shown in joy; its power can now destroy sorrow: "mit vreude er wirt nu vür getragen; ir sorge ist unde gar geslagen" (vss. 807,25-26). Another mysterious quality of the Grail is revealed when Feirefiz, the heathen, is shown the Grail on the green silk scarf, and he only sees the scarf: "dê sprach der heiden vôch gemât: / ich ensihe nîht van ein schmadf" (vss. 810,10-11). The Grail is invisible to the heathen. Tyrturel explains to him that he is blind to it now, but that, if he were to be baptized, he also would have joy in the Grail (vss. 813,16-22).

has said about the Grail in that only the pure in heart may keep it. A luke-warm heart is not pure, and Parzival's heart must be cleansed before he can become Grail King. This way of purification is the central theme of the story, and in the end when he becomes Grail King he is no longer neutral. Trevrizent later on tells Parzival that he was not telling the truth when he told him that he would not obtain the Grail. He says: "I lied your spirit to mislead, Of the Grail and its condition, Obedience now I must accord, To you my nephew and my lord, The angels God had driven, As luke-warm out of Heaven, Here with the Grail were staying--That's what I once was saying." (vss. 798,6-14) The matter remains unexplained.
We hear that Parzival's son Lohengrin will be his successor as Grail King. Here Wolfram's account comes to an end.

Wolfram's Grail, in summary, is a stone which represents the wish of paradise. The one who is to serve it must be pure of heart and body. The Grail is hard to find and can only be found by the appointed one who must find God first in order to be able to find the Grail. Once the Grail is found it creates an abundance of meat and drink for a large gathering, gives eternal youth, and its sight gives life to the dying. All who dwell in its presence are radiantly fair, with an imperishable beauty. Even if a man were to live two hundred years he would not grow old in its presence. The sanctity, awe, and mystery surrounding the Grail are manifest in the law of strict purity laid on all who serve it, by the fact that it is too heavy for the sinner to carry away, and by the fact that a heathen cannot even see it. Its inaccessibility also adds to its mystery. One of its powers is to burn the Phoenix to ashes to make it shine again as new, while we must remember that the Phoenix is a symbol of the resurrection. As a lapidary symbol it can remind us of many distant rituals and legends which all have oriental beginnings and are all somehow connected with the mystery of Being, resurrection, and eternal life. Every year, on Good Friday, the power of the Grail is renewed by a heaven-sent dove which lays a host upon the stone to return then into heaven. The dove has thus become the emblem of all who serve the Grail. Those who are to serve the Grail are mysteriously re-
revealed by a writing on the Grail-stone itself. Perfection in
heaven awaits those who serve the Grail here on earth. The so­
called neutral angels serve the Grail. The movements of the
planets and the heavenly bodies are also mysteriously connected
with the Grail's power. The mysteries of the Grail are further
enhanced by the absence of any direct description of it
and by the hyperbolical terms in which it is spoken of.

There is no doubt as to the symbolic interpretation of the
Grail. All of its characteristics point toward the divine and
are so identical to our Christian doctrines about the promise
which awaits us in heaven that I do not need to insist to be
convincing that the acquisition of the Grail kingdom is symbolic
of the attainment of heaven. The Grail kingdom is a physical
realm here on earth symbolic of the spiritual realm of heaven.
The rich food the Grail grants is symbolic of the spiritual
food of which one has to partake in order to find God.

The emphasis on purity, on resurrection, on Christ in the
phoenix and his body represented by the wafer, on the Holy
Spirit in the emblem of the dove, and the emphasis on the powers
of the Grail to sustain life and youth are indicative of
this theological interpretation. God is the center of the
quest, and God revealed Himself through Jesus Christ and is with
us through the Holy Spirit. This is why so many symbolical
references are made to Christ and the Holy Spirit in connection
with the Holy Grail. We think of the symbolism connected with the Fisher King and its possible symbolic interpretation in the anagram signifying Christ; we remember that the Fisher King is attired with peacock plumes:

\[ \text{sin huot was phævin} \]
(W. P. vs. 225,12)

The peacock was a common symbol of the resurrection in the early church, supposedly because the peacock’s new feathers, when he molts, are more beautiful than the ones he loses. Wolfram was no doubt acquainted with this symbol from the numerous representations of a peacock in stained glass windows.

Rohr even believes that Perceval himself is symbolic of Christ. He has a shield depicting a stag which is a symbol of Christ; his mother’s swooning is reminiscent of Mary’s anguish at the foot of the cross; his temptations are similar to Christ’s; and his way of purification was done for others as Christ died on the cross to save all. This interpretation seems to present more problems rather than solve any. To depict a young naïve person such as Farzival was in the beginning as Christ and to let him marry (unless one looks on Gondwiramur as the Church, therefore Christ’s bride, of which Wolfram gives no indication whatsoever) seems even sacrilegious. It is an interesting idea, and it may have been that Wolfram’s audience saw a symbol for Christ in this young hero who gained lordship over the Grail.

One characteristic of Farzival which perhaps influenced Rohr

in his symbolic interpretation is his shining brightness:

\[\text{der glast alsus en strîte lac,}
\text{sin varwe laschte beidiu licht:}
\text{des was sīn līp versūmet niht.}
\text{(vss. 167,18-20)}\]

and:

\[\text{durch ēsers rām was līcht sīn schīn.}
\text{(vs. 256,10)}\]

His brightness shown through his armor.

Wolfram was very interested in showing the true worth of his hero, and thus to explain why he had been chosen to be Grail King. His shining brightness from his youth on was an indication of his destiny as King of the Grail. His divine purpose is evident throughout, although Parzival does not realize this himself till later on. His innocence and purity have been stressed, despite his sins which we have discussed, and, as Cohen points out about Chrétien's Perceval, one is reminded of the beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". 22 If we interpret the work allegorically we could indeed say that the story of Parzival illustrates this beatitude beautifully.

The symbolic interpretation of the romance as a whole, which I believe to be the best, has been given by Ehriismann. 23 He says that a symbolic representation of the deliverance of all mankind takes place in the three acts of Parzival: from the simplicity of the world of childhood, through his fall from

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grace, alienated from God, to his entrance into the world of conflict between flesh and spirit to be purified and to return to a full unification with God. Parzival is thus the representative of all mankind's Heilsgeschichte: his innocence in the Garden of Eden, his fall from grace, and his redemption. In Parzival's case his salvation is dependant on his search for and attainment of the Grail. In the case of all mankind salvation is dependant on the search for and the attainment of the kingdom of God.

24. Ibid.
THE ULTIMATE QUEST

The main symbolic value of Chrétien's and Wolfram's Grail lies in the quest, the ultimate quest for God. Helen Dunbar has made the statement in her book that there has never been a time in history when men have not "engaged in some sort of mystical quest and adventure." However, medieval man especially found himself on a constant quest for knowledge of God. His cathedrals, his literature, his philosophy, his science, his ideas are all testimony of this fact. In the new idealization of reality in the Middle Ages, which grew out of the development of courtly love and its social concomitants was the deep motivation of the quest. "For alchemists in vicissitudinous search, the metamorphosis was accomplished by the Philosopher's Stone, symbol of Christ acting through love; for the knights of the Quest achievement lay in the Grail with its gift of mystic union with the sacramental Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit; for Dante on pilgrimage, attainment came in that all-revealing communion with Beatrice in which she, as symbol of Love, manifests herself sacramental symbol of Christ at the consecration of the Eucharist."  

1. H. Flanders Dunbar, op. cit., p. 450.  
2. Ibid., p. 445.
Dante's *Commedia* represents the synthesis of medieval symbolic thought. He labored long hours in order to make his work convey the symbolic heights of the message of the scriptures. And he succeeded as only one who employs the Symbolic Method can, for only symbols can make perceptible the eternal mysteries of life -- they can express the inexpressible. In the *Arthuriad*, however, though full of allegorical connections there is less conscious symbolism which makes it harder to trace and to interpret. There is not yet a systematic Symbolic Method, and this fact is responsible for our uncertainty. Another difference between Dante's Symbolic Method and the Grail legends is that Dante's quest is built on a unified structure, based on the very core of Christian doctrine (although he too had a great love and admiration for pagan antiquity -- he is led by Virgil through the *Inferno*). The Grail legends have no such unified foundation. While interpreting the symbolism of the Grail, I have pointed out but not elaborated on the various traces of pagan ritual or folklore in the Grail romances. I would like to give a concrete example of a pagan element and its connection with the Grail-quest.

Primitive man worshiped the sun. He saw in the sun the bringer of life, light, and heat. It was a worship and adoration

3. Ibid.
which came natural to him, and we find it incorporated in all
primitive religions. Helen Dunbar has pointed out in her
fascinating book on medieval symbolism that the center of
the medieval quest is the sun. Here we are reminded of
Chrétien's description of the Grail and its brightness. The
sun has always been worshiped by man and with the
advent of Christianity rather than do away with sun worship,
man made the sun no longer equal to God but symbol of God.
Examples of this symbolism can be found in numerous
early Christian hymns (still used today) and in the New Testa-
ment itself. The fourth century hymn "Lucis largitum splendide"
is an excellent example:

Lucis largitor splendide, Far brighter than our earthly sun,
Cuius serens lumine Thyself at once the Light of Day,
Post lepsa noctis tempora The inmost chambers of the heart
Dies refusus panditum. Illumining with heavenly ray.

(Aeolicae hymnicae mediæ ævi, Vol. LI, Cluniac NS,
seventh century, No. 6, p. 9)6

Helen Dunbar has pointed out that the legends of pagan deities had to
be reinterpreted with the coming of Christianity in order to fit
into the Christian scheme, relating them either to Christ or to
some saint.7 E. K. Chambers has made the statement that the
comparative study of religion proves that "the traditional
beliefs and customs of the medieval or modern peasant are in
nine cases out of ten but the detritus of heathen mythology and
heathen worship enduring with but little external change in
the shadows of a hostile faith."8 Thus pagan sun worship

4. Ibid., p. 106.
5. Cf. p. 34.
was carried over to Christianity, and the pagan elements were in some measure reconciled to the Christian. The result is that my interpretation of the Grail as a symbol of the quest for God, though seemingly contradictory of Weston's argument of the pagan origin is not so different from it, in that the Grail-quest is reminiscent of the pagan quest for knowledge of the mysteries of Life, both physical and spiritual. To the ancient mind it had been a quest for the great Unknown -- they called it by many names. To the medieval mind to which the Christian message had been revealed it was a quest for God.

Helen Dunbar has said: "The Quest of the Grail was too tremendous and too powerful in medieval symbolism not to have left its mark in many places. Even today its symbolic power through association running far back of history and happily free from all flavor of pietism, draws to it an ascription of sacred character: the great Wagnerian Parsifal in which the music itself carries out the imagery of the seasons, is performed automatically on Good Friday, its appropriate place in the solar drama of the Christian year. In the spring is portrayed the triumph of Christ -- and all heroes who have shared in sun imagery -- over the motionless, dark, cold blight of evil. There is something deep within even the unlettered that shows him more than farce in the confusion of the simple"

Parsifal when asked his name: "I have had many names."

Truly, he had."\(11\)

As I have pointed out in the Introduction the Grail romances have their rightful place among the great literary works of the Middle Ages and among the great literary works of all time. I place them second only to Dante's great masterpiece in importance.

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CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have represented a different point of view from most Chrétien and Wolfram lovers, and I have started from an entirely different angle, namely from the purely symbolic concept of the Grail in the works themselves, while disregarding all the source theories in order to let only the authors themselves determine the results of my study.

I have tried to prove that both Chrétien and Wolfram thought of the Grail as a Christian object by demonstrating the Christian characteristics of the Grail and a few of the Christian motifs which are found throughout the story. I have shown that the Grail-quest is in reality a God-quest. I have also explained that the Grail possesses all the basic characteristics of a symbol as defined by Whitehead for the symbol in general and by Tillich for the religious symbol.

In spite of all the theories of pagan origin and their probability it is interesting to note how completely the Christian interpretation of its symbolic value fits. I do not mean that on the basis of this symbolic analysis I can claim to adhere to the Christian theory of origin. To look on the Grail as a symbol, however, might help explain some of the heterogenous and incongruous ideas about it.
Obviously the Grail was not known as an object to any of the writers of whom we possess works today. Whether or not the Grail Writers' sources gave a concrete description of the Grail, we do not know. Chrétien and Wolfram did not describe the appearance of the Grail in any concrete detail. They were obviously talking about something they had never seen and were attaching a great value to this mysterious object, either because they thought it would make a good story, or because in their minds the Grail was really worth describing in all its mystery for the value of its symbolic interpretation. Most likely it was for both of these reasons.

Now were we to ask a group of people about the symbolic significance of the flag of the United States, and each person we asked were and American, making it likely that they all had been similarly initiated into the symbolism of the American flag, then I am certain that the result would be a great variety of different answers, depending on each individual's insight into the object's meaning and their personal experience with that object. Likewise Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, and all the others: Manessier, Gerbert, Heinrich von dem Türlin, Robert de Boron..., having each been initiated into the mysteries of the Grail through their various sources and adding their personal interpretations, will present a different idea and stress one aspect of the Grail more than another. This accounts perhaps for some of the diversity of the Grail accounts.
The source problem remains unsolved. For having discovered that the symbolic value of the Grail is Christian does in no way imply that when the Grail was not yet a symbol but an object that then it was also Christian. The question as to when the Grail became a symbol and whether it was a cauldron of plenty, a Philosopher's Stone, the chalice of the Lord's Supper before it became a symbol is unanswerable. I lean toward the theory that the Grail as a symbol is a product of several converging symbols, that therefore it is possible that the different concepts of the Grail arose simultaneously in different areas to be melted into one.

For the understanding and the interpretation of Chrétien's and Wolfram's story of the Grail I think it is most important to realize that the symbolic interpretation given to the Grail by Chrétien and Wolfram themselves is Christian. The value of this opinion which I have attempted to prove is literary rather than historical.
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