

John Colet's *Opus de sacramentis* and Clerical Anticlericalism: The Limitations of "Ordinary Wayes"

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"I wilnot give my dogge that bred that some prestes doth
minister at the Alter when thei be not in clene lyff."
(statement attributed to Elisabeth Sampson, 1509)¹

How subversively anticlerical was late medieval Catholic reform in England? Were Elisabeth Sampson or perhaps John Wyclif the reformer or malcontent at hand, one might expect scholars rapidly to identify reform with subversion. But if John Colet's name is dropped in the conversation, "reform" will generally take on a different meaning. Son of one of London's most popular mayors, Colet was a pluralist who progressed along the familiar and painstakingly protracted route to the doctorate of theology during the final decade of the fifteenth and the first of the sixteenth century. Along the way he struck up close and lasting friendships with Erasmus, Thomas More, and William Warham. To the last of these, he probably owed his appointment in 1504 as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London where he served until his death in 1519. To be sure, he often berated the church for its worldliness, but this brief outline of his rather unspectacular career, information about the company he kept, and the tone of most of his critical remarks incline one to associate him with the polite protest, which is considered characteristic of humanistic Catholicism. For all this, however, there is reason to suspect that Colet became increasingly subversive after he left his Oxford studies and moved to London.

Conventionally grouped with John Colet's Oxford lectures and treatises, his *Opus de sacramentis ecclesiae* has never figured prominently in analysis of his reformist sympathies.² The undeniable modera-

¹ *The Reign of Henry VII from Contemporary Sources*, ed. A. F. Pollard, vol. 3 (London, 1914) p. 244, citing the London episcopal registers of Richard Fitzjames.

² Joseph H. Lupton edited all and translated most of Colet's surviving Oxford Works: *Opus de sacramentis ecclesiae* (London, 1867), hereafter *De sacramentis*; *Super opera Dionysii* (London, 1869), hereafter *Opera Dionysii*; *Enarratio in epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos* (London, 1873), hereafter *Ad Romanos*; *Enarratio in primam epistolam S. Pauli ad Corinthios*, (London, 1874), hereafter *Ad Corinthios*; and *Opuscula quaedam theologica* (London, 1876), hereafter *Opuscula*. *De sacramentis* remains untranslated. John Pits printed a catalogue of Colet's writings in his *Relationum historicarum de rebus Anglicis* (Paris, 1619) 692. The Gregg Press reprinted Pits's *Relationum* (1969) and, in four volumes, Lupton's editions (1965-1966).

tion of his remarks on church reformation has been amply documented from the early Oxford compositions (1496-1501) and from his 1512 "reformation" sermon. But this leaves substantially unexplained Colet's acknowledged appeal among London's Lollards and his troubles with Bishop Fitzjames, the reconstruction of which suffers from the loss of Colet's preaching *ad populum*. In fact, we can never be certain of the shape of John Colet's career in London or of his mature understanding of church order and church reform. Reevaluation of *De sacramentis*, however, suggests that opinions presented there distinctively amplify Colet's Oxford statements and, when the treatise's traditional dating is challenged, those amplifications significantly supplement the little that is known of Colet's London sentiments and difficulties. It is too much to promise that these considerations entirely lift the fog that has descended on Colet's London. But by coordinating the few fragments of evidence of Colet's life in the London of Elisabeth Sampson and her persecutors with a fresh look at *De sacramentis*, this paper intends to contribute to the ongoing identification and definition of late medieval clerical anticlericalism and to make a more complete appraisal of John Colet's place in its history.

I

Clerical discontent with colleagues' improprieties regularly found expression during the fifteenth century in popular preaching. It was then a short step from pulpit stories of scandal to anecdotes and images circulating in satirical ballads and perhaps a still shorter step from the sermons and songs to expressions in Lollard invective of lay dissatisfactions.³ Periods of relative quiet, nevertheless, make it difficult to trace a Lollard "movement" through the fifteenth century or to excavate a Lollard "underground" in the later Middle Ages. Lay as well as clerical disenchantment, however, is discernible, and unrest not infrequently erupted into violence, which cost prelates their calm and, in instances, their property and their lives. Late in the fourteenth century, statutes prohibiting unlawful assemblies were invoked to protect a pastor in Exeter from his "sheep," "*armez à faire de guerre*."⁴ Even the most outspoken clerical critics among the mendicant orders were unlikely to condone violence, but conscientious clerical opposition to inordinate taxa-

³ Consult the work of G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, U.K., 1926) but especially *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, U.K., 1933) pp. 210-86.

⁴ *Select Cases in Chancery, 1364-1471*, ed. William Paley Baildon (London, 1896) pp. 83-84. Writs *de excommunicato capiendo* at times specified the offense for which persons were sought, and assault upon a cleric was not infrequently signified. See F. Donald Logan, *Excommunication and the Secular Arm in Medieval England*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts 15 (1968) 49-53.

tion and other abuses reflected and perhaps encouraged more stubborn antagonisms among the laity.

Associations between clerical and lay dissent need still to be studied. John Colet, for example, is commonly taken as a spokesman for the Tudor literati. Expressing their growing disappointment in the church, but speaking cautiously and *ad clerum*, he objected to his colleagues' apparent obsession with tithes, mortuaries, and worldly gain.⁵ His discreet protest in 1512 is commonly associated with complaints that surfaced as well in the works of Catholic humanists, some of whom Colet befriended at Oxford.⁶ Yet more intemperate dissidents regarded the Dean of St. Paul's, after he arrived in London in 1504 to assume his duties, as something of an ally.⁷

There is certainly reason to suspect Colet's indifference, if not his disguised support, with reference to lay and Lollard inculpations. The clergy had gathered in 1512 to hear Colet condemn Lollardy, but his sermon swerved suddenly from its brief mention "of heretykes, men mad with marveyulous folysshenes," and turned to rehearse at considerable length the church's least spiritual practices. "But the heresies of them are not so pestilent and pernicious . . . as the evyll and wicked life of pristes."⁸ Other sermons, now lost, must have been sufficiently subversive to earn him the admiration of proscribed heretics and to prompt the censure of his bishop, Richard Fitzjames. Hugh Latimer claimed,

⁵ *The Sermon of Doctor Colete, made to the Convocacion at Paulis*, in Joseph H. Lupton, *Life of Dean Colet* (London, 1909) p. 296, hereafter *Sermon*. But also consult *A Sermon of Conforming and Reforming made to the Convocation at St. Paul's Church in London by John Colet, D.D.*, ed. Thomas Smith (Cambridge, U.K., 1661). Smith's immense erudition, reflected in copious annotations, makes his early edition indispensable.

⁶ See Peter Iver Kaufman, "John Colet and Erasmus' *Enchiridion*," *Church History* 46 (1977) 296-312.

⁷ *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattley, (London, 1837-1841) 4.229-230 and 5.217. But Professor Rupp may have inferred too much when he liberally speculated on the basis of these remarks that "Lollards were to be seen, nodding or exchanging patronizing glances during [Colet's] sermons." E. Gordon Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge, U.K., 1949) p. 17. Also note Karl Bauer, "John Colet und Erasmus von Rotterdam," *Archiv für Reformations geschichte, Ergänzungsband* 5 (1929) 175.

⁸ *Sermon*, p. 298. Consult Michael J. Kelly, "Canterbury Jurisdiction and Influence During the Episcopate of William Warham, 1503-1532," (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1963) p. 112 for arguments against the traditional dating of the sermon (1512). His principal point is that Colet's call for reforming councils might more plausibly have been staged during the convocation in 1510, after a six-year interval between such gatherings. The evidence for either date is circumstantial. One might reasonably conclude that Colet's urgency on the question of councils reflects both the failure of the 1510 convocation to inspire reform and the mood of reformers between the publication of the bulls for Lateran in 1511 and the actual council later in 1512. I have retained the traditional date, but the matter may be left unresolved without undermining the discussion of *De sacramentis* here. With respect to Colet's classification of "the evyll and wicked lyfe of pristes" as "a certeyn kynde of heresy," see Owst's notation on the influence of "seynte Bernard" of Clairveaux's similar complaint and its considerable influence in fifteenth-century sermons. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p. 268.

decades after the fact, that Colet himself came within inches of the stake.⁹ Erasmus probably had more intimate knowledge of the official reprimand, but his tendentious account is unreliable. His elaborate insistence on his friend's innocence fails ultimately to remove suspicion that the bishop and his episcopal collaborators hounded Colet for other than personal reasons.¹⁰ The little left from that period, however, may simply be too little to yield a clear picture of the controversy, to explain Colet's attraction for Lollards, and to settle doubts about his reformist sympathies.

Colet's time at Oxford is much more familiar to students of prereformation religious thought. His reputation improved dramatically with the proliferation of Erasmus studies that alleged the centrality of Colet's influence in Erasmus's early theological development.¹¹ Erasmus's visit with Colet at Oxford in 1499 has been taken as the genesis of the great humanist's interest in scriptural study and exegesis.¹² More than a cen-

⁹ Hugh Latimer, "The Seventh Sermon on the Lord's Prayer," *Sermons* (New York, 1906) p. 374.

¹⁰ *Opus epistolarum D. Erasmi*, ed. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1906-1958) 4.523-525. Erasmus was intent on demonstrating to Justus Jonas, the recipient of the "biography" of Colet, the orthodoxy of Colet and thereby the possibility of a reformation more moderate than the one that had attracted Jonas to Saxony. See Heinz Holeczek, "Die Haltung des Erasmus zu Luther nach dem Scheitern seiner Vermittlungspolitik 1520/1," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 64 (1973) 91-92, 108-109.

¹¹ E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (New York, 1956) pp. 70-78: "...it was Colet more than any other human being who was the source of Erasmus' vision and sense of calling" (70). Leland Miles noted other reasons for what he termed a virtual renaissance of Colet scholarship, but the impressive number of studies that both prefigured and corroborated Harbison's claim seem to me largely responsible. See Miles's "Platonism and Christian Doctrine: The Revival of Interest in John Colet," *Philosophical Forum* 21 (1963-1964) 87-103; and, *inter alia*, J. B. Pineau, *Erasme sa pensée religieuse* (Paris, 1924) pp. 90-91, 97; Ivan Pusino, "Der Einfluss Picos auf Erasmus," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 46 (1928) 93-96; Lamberto Borghi, *Umanesimo e concezione religiosa in Erasmo di Rotterdam*, *Studi di lettere storicae philosophia* 7 (1935) 39-40; Raymond Marcel, "Les 'décourvertes' d'Erasme en Angleterre," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 14 (1952) 120-123; Augustin Renaudet, *Erasme et l'Italie*, *Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance* 15 (1954) 30-31; Charles Bene, *Erasme et Saint Augustin*, *Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance* 103 (1969) 189-194; Albert Rabil, Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of A Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, 1972), pp. 38-47; J. Kelly Sowards, *Desiderius Erasmus* (Boston, 1975) pp. 20-21; and Robert Stupperich, *Erasmus von Rotterdam und seine Welt* (Berlin, 1977) pp. 51-56.

¹² See Friedrich Dannenberg, *Das Erbe Platons in England bis zur Bildung Lylys*, *Neue Forschung: Arbeiten zur Geistesgeschichte der germanischen und romanischen Völker* 13 (1932) 66, who is certainly wrong, however, about Colet's influence upon Erasmus's Greek studies. Colet knew next to no Greek and he confessed late in life and long after Erasmus had become accomplished in the language, "nunc me tenet quod non didicerim Graecum sermonem, sine cuius peritia nihil sumus." *Opus epistolarum* 2.257. Roland Bainton may even have been correct to assume that Colet's philological unsophistication inspired his friend to achieve mastery over the language. See, *inter alia*, P. Albert Duhamel, "The Oxford Lectures of John Colet: An Essay in Defining the English Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953) 493-510; Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York, 1969) p. 62; and Catherine A. L. Jarrott,

tury ago, after piecing together lectures, treatises, and correspondence, Frederic Seebohm awarded Colet his own "Oxford Reformation" and nominated Erasmus as its most noteworthy representative.¹³ With a generous tolerance for ambiguity, generations of scholars more or less accepted Seebohm's story.¹⁴ The center of the Oxford circle, ambitiously made "vast" by Paolo Brezzi, was consistently reserved for John Colet.¹⁵ It seems that whenever indignation, criticism, gossip, and scandal are orchestrated to call attention to the deterioration of church discipline or the rising standards applied by Tudor society to its church, Colet's Oxford is made the headquarters of humanistic and essentially conservative reform. With little hesitation, the few remains of Colet's London career have been swept into the "Oxford Reformation," much as if his final fifteen years could be absorbed by the myth created to account for the preceding ten. There is, of course, something to be said for the traditional evaluations of Colet's enduring conservatism. In 1512, he still believed that the church possessed its own means to clean house, and when he urged his colleagues "let the laws be rehearsed," he referred to what Thomas More would later call the "ordinary ways" of canon law devised to discipline the church.¹⁶ To an extent, then, it is legitimate to mine the Oxford lectures and treatises for omens in order to predict Colet's more mature interests. One may yet point out the limitations of *méthodes de divinisation*. Behind John Colet's appeal to "ordinary ways" for church reform, there is a truly extraordinary vision, which represents an intensification of the Oxford sentiments and which presents itself clearly in *De sacramentis*.

De sacramentis is a reminder of the clergy's responsibilities to make and preserve the church *sine macula et ruga*, to prepare the bride of Christ for her wedding.¹⁷ This is the point to which Colet returns in his discussion of each sacrament and also a point that he earlier ascribed to

"Erasmus's Annotations and Colet's Commentaries on Paul: A Comparison of Some Theological Themes," *Essays on the Works of Erasmus* (New Haven, 1978) pp. 125-144; but also consult Charles Béné's discussion of the "desaccord profond" between Colet and Erasmus on the principles of exegesis. Béné. *Erasmé et Saint Augustin*, 109-112.

¹³ Frederic Seebohm, *The Oxford Reformation*, 3rd ed. (London, 1887).

¹⁴ See, e.g., Joseph H. Lupton, *The Influence of Dean Colet Upon the Reformation of the English Church* (London, 1893); Augustin Renaudet, *Prêriforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie, 1494-1517* (Paris, 1916); Karl Bauer, *John Colet and Erasmus von Rotterdam*, pp. 155-187; J. A. R. Marriott, *The Life of John Colet* (London, 1933); and William A. Clebsch, "John Colet and Reformation," *Anglican Theological Review* 37 (1955) pp. 167-177. Objections to "the Seebohm line" occasionally have been voiced, but never more forcefully than by Albert Hyma, "Erasmus and the Oxford Reformers," *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 25 (1932) pp. 69-92, 97-134; and by Eugene F. Rice, Jr., "John Colet and the Annihilation of the Natural," *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952) pp. 141-163.

¹⁵ Paolo Brezzi, *La Riforme Cattoliche dei secoli XV e XVI* (Rome, 1945) p. 39.

¹⁶ *Sermon* 300-302, and *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, vol. 9, ed. J. B. Trapp (New Haven, 1979) p. 100.

¹⁷ *De sacramentis* pp. 65-68, 77-78, 82-83.

the pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁸ Possibly while still at Oxford, Colet composed for a friend a paraphrase of the pseudo-Dionysius's *Hierarchies*. The similarities between the paraphrase and *De sacramentis* have encouraged speculation that they were written in rapid succession.¹⁹ Joseph Lupton added to this his insistence that *De sacramentis* "betoken[ed] a study of books rather than of the world" and thus more properly belonged to the university than to the urban cathedral. Lupton explicitly cited only the treatise's "exaltation of celibacy,"²⁰ but what he took to have been a personal preference and prescription was, in essence, an "exaltation" of the entire church wherein all believers were priests, made pure and therefore celibate.²¹ Colet's own position on clerical celibacy did not change when he exchanged the lectern for the pulpit.²² But *De sacramentis*' "exaltation" of the church represents a distinct development of several themes characteristic of the Oxford works, and this suggests a later date of composition than those commonly assigned.

The argument for Oxford origin, then, rests on the inspiration for *De sacramentis* provided by the pseudo-Dionysius, on the similarities between *De sacramentis* and Colet's paraphrases of the *Hierarchies*, and on the presumption that Colet would surely have halted work of this nature after his friend William Grocyn announced his own assault on the apostolicity of "*Divus Dionysius*" in 1501.²³ Grocyn's announcement bears the weight of the argument. The hidden premise here is that Colet either remained ignorant, of, or unpersuaded by, earlier "proofs" of pseudonymity. From the fact that Colet either wrote or let stand his remarks on "*Paulus et ejus discipulus Dionisius Ariopagita*" after his far-reaching conversations with Erasmus in 1499, it must be inferred, if we are to follow the logic of this argument, that Erasmus uncharacteristically kept silent about the philological advances of his favorite, Lorenzo Valla.²⁴ Perhaps Erasmus simply failed where Grocyn succeeded. Yet it is more reasonable to hold that Colet saw no need for partisanship on this

¹⁸ *Opera Dionysii* pp. 232-243.

¹⁹ See Sears Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino* (Oxford, 1963) pp. 29-34 for a remarkably shrewd reconstruction of the order of composition of Colet's Oxford works.

²⁰ *De sacramentis*, "Introduction," pp. 16-18, 27.

²¹ *De sacramentis*, p. 76.

²² "Epitome of the Statutes of the Cathedral, Drawn up by Dean Colet," *Registrum statutorum et consuetudinem ecclesiae cathedralis Sancti Pauli Londinensis*, ed. W. Sparrow Simpson (London, 1873) p. 225, and E. F. Carpenter, "The Reformation: 1485-1660," *A History of St. Paul's Cathedral*, ed. W. R. Matthews and W. M. Atkins (London, 1957) p. 113.

²³ Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 29-30.

²⁴ *Ad Corinthios* p. 171 and *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 176, 254-255. Ten years before his visit to England, Erasmus had so insisted that his friends esteem Valla as he did that at least one close friendship (with Cornelius Gerard) nearly collapsed. See *Opus Epistolarum* l.108-111, 114, 119-120. C. Reedijk quite sensibly refuses to be taken in by the "bantering tone" of some of Erasmus's remarks, and he attributes the break in correspondence between Erasmus and Gerard to the seriousness of their disagreement about Valla. See Reedijk's *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus* (Leiden, 1956) pp. 53-54.

particular issue. He probably received Erasmus's intelligence, if shared, in the same way he later greeted Groycn's disclosures. Accepting both as plausible, he continued to value the pseudo-Dionysius's contributions to ecclesiology and sacramental theology, notwithstanding his bruised apostolicity. Possibly John Jewel knew of some utterance, lost to us, when he ventured that Colet finally joined with other critics and repudiated his statements about the *Hierarchies'* author.²⁵ But his trust in their authority lasted throughout his life.²⁶

If scepticism is permitted with respect to Lupton's opinion of *De sacramentis'* bookish character and with respect to Colet's abrupt abandonment of the pseudo-Dionysius in 1501, one is left with only the similarities between the paraphrases and *De sacramentis*. But to fix the date of composition on this basis is perilous. Sears Jayne made a convincing case for the Oxford origin of the paraphrases by citing parallels between Colet's *Hierarchies* and his Oxford lectures and glosses on Ficino's *Epistolae*.²⁷ By the same token, however, *De sacramentis* may be assigned to Colet's London career. The short treatise's very structure, the order of the sacraments, matches more precisely the arrangement of the sacraments in Colet's "Catechyzon," unquestionably written in London, than the organization of his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.²⁸ More important, Colet's paraphrases speak uncertainly and relatively infrequently of the pseudo-Dionysius's "inferior" hierarchs, the *leiturgoi* or *ministri*, but *De sacramentis* shows greater solicitude for "doorkeepers, readers, exorcists, and that type laboring in the lower church spiritually to achieve the purgation of humankind."²⁹ The pseudo-Dionysius was not particularly preoccupied with these lesser lights, and so Colet's paraphrases granted them no special distinction.³⁰ *De sacramentis* distinguished among these *ministri* their proper offices and tasks in the church's "versatile ministry of reconciliation."³¹ The concern is more to be expected from a cathedral administrator than from an Oxford lecturer.

²⁵ *The Works of John Jewell*, vol. 1, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1845) pp. 113-114: "...yet it is judged by Erasmus, John Colet, and others, many grave and learned that [Dionysius] cannot be Areopagita, St. Paul's disciple...."

²⁶ J. B. Trapp makes a similar point with reference to Colet's instructions, issued after he moved to London, that Peter Meghen copy his abstracts of the *Hierarchies*. "John Colet, His Manuscripts, and the Pseudo-Dionysius," *Classical Influences in European Culture, A.D. 1500-1700*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge, U.K., 1976) pp. 219-220. Also consult the account of Colet's 1515 sermon, preached in Westminster Abbey, Lupton, *Life of Dean Colet*, pp. 193-198.

²⁷ Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, p. 30.

²⁸ The "Catechyzon" was reprinted in Lupton, *Life of Dean Colet*, pp. 285-289.

²⁹ *De sacramentis*, p. 83, and cf. *Registrum statutorum*, p. 225.

³⁰ The identity of the Latin translation of the *Hierarchies* consulted by Colet is still a matter of some disagreement. Eugene Rice has made a convincing case for Lefevre d'Étaples' 1498 translation, which was unavailable to me. My citations refer to the *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* printed with the pseudo-Dionysius's *Opera* in Strasbourg, 1503 and reissued in Frankfurt, 1970 (hereafter *Hierarchia*). For the *leiturgoi*, cf. *Hierarchia* 173r-175r and *Opera Dionysii* 240-242. Also note Rice's review of Sears Jayne's *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, in *Renaissance News* 17 (1964) 108.

³¹ *De sacramentis* pp., 46, 49.

But the best reason to separate *De sacramentis* from the paraphrases is Colet's inclination in the former more enthusiastically to detail the sanctification of the Christian life in terms of the expansion and "exaltation" of the priesthood. In London, as at Oxford, Colet stressed that fraud and greed interfered with the church's ministry at all levels and that "in the name of Christianity, the greater part of humankind become pagans,"³² inasmuch as "lay people have great occasion of evils and cause to fall when those men whose dutie is to drawe men from the affection of this world, by their continual conversation in this world, teche men to love this world, and of the love of this world cast them heedlyng in to hell."³³ But especially in London, and in *De sacramentis*, Colet formulated what it must be like to be drawn from the world, and this sanctification became equivalent to "*sacerdotificans*."

II

Colet had long demanded that "faithful ministers" act as servants rather than as masters of their church.³⁴ They were considered something of a special breed, and Colet was alarmed that they had become indistinguishable from worldly persons whom they should have summoned from irresponsibility to righteousness. The "bright order of men, simple and perfect in God," set, Colet imagined, as a "city on a hill," "above the chaos of confusion and worldliness," had been horribly defiled. Priests too frequently were unsuccessful in purging themselves of the disease that they were ordained to cure in others.³⁵ It was axiomatic for Colet that the mysteries of salvation were revealed exclusively to the pure and humble, in whom God's Spirit worked to draw all creation from worldly pursuits and preoccupations,³⁶ and so the reform of the clergy was not simply a matter of decency but rather a matter of cosmic salvation. Dispositions must be restored to the clergy who would then

³² *Ibid.* p. 75.

³³ *Sermon*, p. 297. Most recent studies explain, without exonerating, that the worldliness to which Colet points here was an accepted part of church administration. Absenteeism, incontinence, and general misconduct were not, it is said, widespread among parish clergy. But "pastoral vision" was wanting among trained lawyers who commonly rose to the episcopacy and bypassed parish service. For a summary opinion, which incorporates the more detailed research of Margaret Bowker and Peter Heath, see J. R. Lander, *Government and Community: England 1450-1509* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980) pp. 105-151. Also consult Felicity Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes* (Cambridge, U.K. 1980) pp. 1-100.

³⁴ *Ad Corinthios*, p. 183.

³⁵ *Opera Dionysii* p. 248: "...ut super cahos confusionis et mundi, aliquorum hominum in Deo simplicium et perfectorum luculentus ordo extet, quae sit civitas in monte posita, quae sit lux mundi et sal terrae.... Sed, proh dolor, fumus et caligo tetra ex valle hominum tenebrosorum tanta jam dudum et tam spissa spiravit sursum, ut civitatis lumen fere obruit."

³⁶ See especially Colet's second lectures on Romans, *Ad Romanos*, pp. 178-181, 194-197, 215-216. Also note *Opera Dionysii*, p. 254.

prompt the recovery of the whole church's spirituality and the repossession of its purpose in the assimilation to God of all souls. Colet's campaign began at Oxford, where he rehearsed St. Paul's efforts to rescue the Corinthians from their own pride and contentiousness.

Among the Corinthians, who thought so well of themselves that they believed there was nothing that they did not know or could not do, he made himself humble, though he was bringing them Christ...so that as a mere human, he might not seem to have done anything and that all might be attributed to God. God operates in his faithful ministers and leads others to faith in his mysteries.³⁷

Humility and unaffected piety acquired special significance in Colet's soteriology and ecclesiology. In the final analysis, the power of the *sacerdotium* depended as greatly upon the priest's example as upon his sacraments. Sacraments confirm that followers are expertly equipped (with the Holy Spirit) to complete their return to God. But without the priest's example, followers cannot be "drawn" or led to their goal.³⁸ If a reprobate priest remains unreformed, one avenue "from the affection of the world" closes. "Unto you we loke as unto markes of our direction," Colet preached in 1512, playing the part of the offended and indignant layman. "In you and in your life we desyre to rede, as in lyvely bokes, howe and after what facion we may lyve.... You spirituall phisitions, fyrst taste you this medicine of purgation of maners, and then after offre us the same to taste."³⁹ By the time Colet issued *ad clerum* this apparent ultimatum, he had concluded that the church's principal obligation was the proliferation of righteousness. He had also decided that the spread of righteousness should minimize differences between cleric and layperson, not on the world's terms or in the world's courts, to be sure, but rather in the communion of truly humble, pious, and therefore spiritual Christians. This decision is most fully presented in *De sacramentis*. It did not abrogate arguments set forth in Colet's Oxford works. Instead, it enlarged the meaning of humility and spirituality.⁴⁰

³⁷*Ad Corinthios*, pp. 177-178: "Atque apud Corinthios, qui non parva de se, nec parum se sapere et posse cogitarunt, si nunciam Christi afferens vili se pendit...ut non ipse homunculus insipiens et impotens, sed sapiens et mirificus Deus in eo videatur omnia egisse, qui operatur in Fidelibus ministris suis, et trahit ad finem mysteriorum suorum quos ipse vult."

³⁸*Opera Dionysii*, p. 241: "...omnes [tres sunt nominati ecclesiastici ordines; pontificum, sacerdotum, et ministrorum] collaborant in abstractione ab hoc mundo, et sanctificatione hominum Deo." Also note *Ad Romanos*, pp. 187-188; *Ad Corinthios*, p. 250; and *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 175-176, 206-207, 220-222.

³⁹*Sermon*, p. 299.

⁴⁰In *Opera Dionysii*, "spirituales homines" are still clergy (250). Laypersons, whose training is complete ("perfecti et consummati Christiani"), are distinguished "sub nomine sanctae plebis" from the clergy, whose spirituality is somehow superior to lay spirituality (252).

Nothing displaced humility at the center of Colet's thoughts on church order and church life. Its centrality, he believed, had been established beyond recall by St. Paul's prescriptions. Practices had developed among clerics that in no way conformed with this teaching, and from the beginning of his career Colet set out to eliminate them. Insofar as inferences coaxed from the vast powers to bind and loose granted to the church made for conceit and impropriety, Colet reinterpreted the scripture's "keys passage" (Matthew 16). He insisted, both at Oxford and in London, that it was more important for priests "to draw" believers toward righteousness than to declare them righteous with a set of privileged pronouncements.⁴¹ He suspected that emphasis on the church's alleged authority to compel divine compliance with its own binding and loosing was hardly warranted by scripture, unlikely to endear the pastor to his flock, and more apt to inspire tyranny than diligent care of souls. The church's more extravagant inferences and claims seemed to Colet to drive a wedge between clergy and laity and to split and then splinter the church into competing anticlerical factions. Equally damaging to the centrality of humility, inclinations to seek and guard private interest invited preoccupation in the church with legal standing and litigation. Commonality of purpose and a conciliatory temper were necessary if Colet's noble ideals of church harmony and unity were ever to shape church life. Realizing this, Colet at first steered his attack toward the church's obsession with property. At Oxford he indulged himself in an outburst against the institution's unbecoming concern with *meum* and *tuum*, which, in his judgment, occasioned and perpetuated dissension and virtually extinguished the charitable spirit that sustained the church in its earliest days.⁴² Yet property was not the real problem. Colet generally conceded that the church was due its revenues.⁴³ He deplored most the contentious spirit that had become associated with the collection of rents

⁴¹ *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 258, 264-265: "Quia est valde annotandum, ut pontifices non insolescant, non esse hominum remittere peccatorum vincula; nec ad eos pertinent potestas solvendi et ligandi quicquam.... Relaxant et retrahunt, solvunt et ligant homines, non ex fide Deo quae ligata sunt in celis, sed quae ipsi volunt, unde omnia disturbantur in terris. Non sunt executores voluntatis Dei, sed actores propriae." Also see *De sacramentis*, pp. 90-92.

⁴² *Opuscula* 259.

⁴³ *Ad Romanos*, pp. 218, 224. But also note Edward Surtz, *The Praise of Pleasure: Philosophy, Education, and Communism in More's "Utopia"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957) pp. 166-167; Gustav Adolf Benrath, *Wyclifs Bibelkommentar* (Berlin, 1966) pp. 332-335; and John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards* (Oxford, 1965) pp. 239-250. Surtz concedes that Colet accepted the inevitability of private property in *status naturae lapsae*. He nevertheless senses that Colet anticipated the *Utopia's* preference for "Christian communism." Actually Colet's ideals more closely resemble those of Wyclif's early biblical commentaries, which reflected mendicant criticisms of the church's greed and worldly dominion. The later Wyclif escalated his war on ecclesiastical possessions and alienated his mendicant supporters, but Thomson, in his survey of later Lollard "doctrines and beliefs," makes no mention of communism. This may mean that Wyclif was remembered as a critic of excess (see, e.g., *Joannis Wyclif Sermones*, ed. Johann Loserth, [London 1887-1890] 2:44-49) and not as a pioneer of prohibitions against ownership, later ascribed to Colet but correctly ascribed to Thomas More.

and subsidies.⁴⁴ The courts fed on contention, but the church starved for want of harmony. "The way to conserve what one has been given," he argued, "ought to be identical to the way it was obtained: through love of God and neighbor . . . endurance of evils, and eagerness to do good for all men."⁴⁵

At Oxford, then, Colet carried St. Paul's campaign against pride and contentiousness to difficulties that beset his own church. The tangle of litigation, in which the spiritual estate was trapped, was but one symptom of the pervasive worldliness of the church. Ideas of equity and justice, which had evolved from an unredeemed society, were far inferior to the church's own "ordinary ways" of arbitration.⁴⁶ If disputes required formal settlement, Colet advised, justice should be sought exclusively from ecclesiastical courts.⁴⁷ But he also considered that affairs had gone too far if this point were reached. The very existence of dispute and dissension within the church was an unmistakable sign that the Holy Spirit had not sufficiently reformed the litigants' dispositions and the church's common life to God's will.⁴⁸ Colet was wary of the limitations of the "ordinary ways" to administer the church and effectively to reform its discipline. Genuine reform became for him principally a question of temperament and piety and only secondarily a question of canon laws and church courts. Accordingly, he undertook at Oxford a major reevaluation of the church's mission in light of St. Paul's various counsels and commands.

The reevaluation quite apparently had not run its course when Colet was called to London. It had already occurred to him that the righteous life must be charted with reference to the *assimilatio Deo*, the desiderandum of the church.⁴⁹ Themes familiar in the Oxford lectures and treatises, however, had not yet been given fresh exposition in light of this disclosure. Colet had learned of the *assimilatio* from the pseudo-

⁴⁴ *Ad Romanos*, pp. 219-220; *Sermon*, p. 303.

⁴⁵ *Ad Corinthios*, p. 186: "In qua proculdubio eadem debet esse ratio conservandi quae data fuerint quondam, quae fuerit comperandi. Amor Dei et proximi, desiderium celestium, contemptus mundanorum, vera pietas, religio, charitas, benignitas erga homines, simplicitas, patientia, tollerantia malorum, studium semper bene faciendi vel omnibus hominibus, ut in constanti bono malum vincant...."

⁴⁶ *Opuscula*, pp. 260-261

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-265; *Ad Corinthios*, pp. 189-190; *Opera Dionysii*, p. 220.

⁴⁸ *Opuscula*, pp. 226, 243 and *Ad Corinthios*, p. 254. But the dissension that Colet took to be a symptom of his ailing church was accepted as commonplace. "The language of the episcopal chancery is pious and edifying," A. H. Thompson remarked, "the preambles of its common forms are full of unction; but the objects for which the whole organization has been built up are legal and judicial." Diocesan administration was characterized principally by systems of tribunals, though church courts in England were not used as extensively as they were in Germany to collect tithes. See A. Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy and Their Organization in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947) pp. 40-71 and Henry J. Cohn, "Reformatorsche Bewegung und Antiklerikalismus in Deutschland und England," *Stadtbürgertum und Adel in der Reformation*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Stuttgart, 1979) pp. 317-318.

⁴⁹ *Hierarchia* 123v., 164v., 167r; and *Opera dionysii* p. 216.

Dionysius. He understood church reform in the terms of St. Paul's precepts and counsels. *De sacramentis* coupled these lessons and stipulated that the extension of righteousness ("*amplificatio justitiae*," "*propaganda justitia in mundo*") required purity of character and the scrupulous administration of the sacraments, which mediated God's generative, purgative, and redemptive activity to the faithful.⁵⁰ The entire hierarchy, priests and sacraments, "*comprehensam sacrorum dispositionem*," was an instrument in the church's reform and return to God, and each priest would need reminding that, as "*medius inter deum et hominem*," he had best shun the habits of men and imitate those of the divine hierarch ("*Dei assidua imitatio*").⁵¹

The priesthood, then, was no place for persons easily unnerved by the enormity of the obligation to cleanse creation and return it to divine favor. Neither was the church a home for persons readily seduced by worldly pleasures and into worldly pursuits. Not only the ordained priest but the layperson as well was unwelcome "*nisi purgatus et perfectus*."⁵² Colet ordered catechumens excluded from the celebration of the sacraments, pollution of which, he feared, jeopardized the church's chances for survival.⁵³ This was nothing new. Augustine specified that catechumens be weaned from a too literal understanding of experience, history, and scripture before being instructed in the mysteries of the church's sacraments.⁵⁴ Colet, however, seems more concerned that the catechumens' unpreparedness would damage the common life of the church. He argues that catechumen, penitent, and apostate are inclined to profane mysteries ("*profanos et foedos habent oculos*") and that complete purgation must precede illumination. *De sacramentis* demands more forcefully than Colet's paraphrases of the pseudo-Dionysius's *Hierarchies* that one enter or reenter the church as a full citizen or not at all.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *De sacramentis*, pp. 40-41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38, 81-82, 90-91. "*Medius*" had a slightly different meaning for Colet in *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 200, 207.

⁵² *De sacramentis*, pp. 84-85. The way of purgation and toward perfection was chartered by the pseudo-Dionysius. For Colet's adaptations, see Catherine A. L. Jarratt, "John Colet on Justification," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 7 (1976) pp. 66-67.

⁵³ *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 254-255.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, e.g., 24.50: "Deinde monendus est ex hac occasione, ut si quid etiam in scripturas audiat, quod carnaliter sonet etiamsi non intelligit, credat tamen spiritale aliquid significare, quod ad sanctos mores futuramque vitam pertineat. Hoc autem ita breviter discit, ut quidquid audierit ex libris canonicis, quod ad dilectionem aeternitatis et veritatis et sanctitatis, et ad dilectionem proximi referre non possit, figurate dictum vel gestum esse credat; atque ita conetur intelligere, ut ad illam geminam referat dilectionem."

⁵⁵ See Colet's earlier remarks on the exclusion of certain classes of Christians from full participation in church life, *Opera Dionysii*, pp. 217-219; but note that some qualifications were allowed to mitigate the prohibitions. Funeral rites, for example, were closed only to catechumens. Colet agreed with the pseudo-Dionysius (*Hierarchia* 176v) that energumens and penitents were likely to profit from attendance inasmuch as they would have received enough instruction to understand what goes on around, if not in, the sacrament of final anointing.

Citizenship here means nothing less than full participation in the propagation of righteousness and, therefore, in the ministry of the church. Colet's "perfectionism," if it can be called that, gives his ecclesiology in *De sacramentis* a radical edge. This would not appear to be accidental. Colet actually has superb control over his exposition, which skillfully and often traverses the distance between the restoration of the single sinner to God's favor through the sacraments and the general reclamation of the whole of creation through the spread of righteousness. After detailing the Christian's duty to turn from worldly objectives, *De sacramentis* presumes that "it was predetermined that a power would proceed from heaven, and, seizing man, it would creep into the flesh of those fallen and make them spiritual [*spiritificans*]." This is but the start of a large scale restoration of the world ("*restauratio mundi per vim revelantem*") in which the whole church plays the part of God's helpmate ("coadjutor"). As man's first helpmate was seduced by the serpent, Colet alleged, this second helper was similarly distracted from its proper aims. The story is briefly but shrewdly narrated. Colet proposed that sacraments purify God's coadjutor and certify each church member as a participant in the world's repair or rebuilding ("*reparatus, reaedificatus*").⁵⁶

With this impressive task in mind, Colet, in a sense, ordained the entire church. *De sacramentis* recalls that, after all, St. Paul urged Roman Christians

to become a holy and priestly race, for it is the priestly office to extend the priesthood. In fact, nothing is the task and office of the priesthood unless self-expansion whereby it offers itself to God to bring it to pass that others offer themselves with it. Thus the whole church may be a priesthood, altogether offering a righteousness [as] a living sacrifice to God.⁵⁷

The equation of righteousness with a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) led Colet directly to the celebrated passage with which he opened his 1512 "reformation sermon." But "*nolite conformari . . . sed reformamini*" (Romans 12:2), in *De sacramentis*, was addressed to the entire church.

Opera Dionysii, p. 260: "...quanquam aliis sacris non sinuntur interesse, parentationibus tamen et iustis interesse possunt, ut ecclesiae officio et spe futura vitae quam cernant in sacris mortuorum, commoneantur ut resipiscentis futuram vitam desiderent." *De sacramentis*, however, insists that partial instruction was no alternative to complete purification. Colet noted that, in this instance, the pseudo-Dionysius had failed adequately to inform readers ("non locutus est Dionysius") of the scrupulous preparation preliminary to participation in any ceremony. See *De sacramentis*, pp. 85-86, 92.

⁵⁶ *De sacramentis*, pp. 62-64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 71: "Et ad eosdem Romanos, quos velit gentem esse sanctam et sacerdotalem (nam est sacerdotis sacerdotium propagare: nihil enim est munus et officium cujusque, nisi propagatio ejusdem et qui se sacrificavit Deo efficere ut secum alii consacrificans justitiam, id est, quisque in ea se justum, vivam hostiam, offerat Deo) scribit...."

Less an inversion than a collapse of the hierarchy, Colet's redesign of church order did not suggest lay supremacy. Layperson and cleric were placed on equal footing with respect to the institution's primary purpose, the proliferation of righteousness. *De sacramentis*, at first, speaks only of angels and traditionally ordained priests as "a divine militia," but by the treatise's end, and apparently in Colet's calculations from the beginning, the ranks have been filled with laypersons, through the ministry of the sacraments, and distinctions in rank essentially have been eradicated.⁵⁸ This represents a substantial advance beyond the paraphrases of the pseudo-Dionysius's *Hierarchy* where those distinctions were preserved.⁵⁹ At Oxford, Colet promoted humility, the purported secret of St. Paul's successes in achieving harmony and unity among dissident Christians, in his own remarks on church practices and policy. *De sacramentis* adapted this more or less conventional *theologia humilitatis* to its restructuring of church policy. The results, as noted, are not what one might have expected from a consistently conservative reformer.

Yet the results of Colet's rethinking of ecclesiology in *De sacramentis* are not altogether unexpected. His Oxford compositions also permitted the line between cleric and layperson to break at points. His earliest lecture on Romans 2 speculated that God would not honor the ordination of a priest who forfeited his place among the truly righteous. Then Colet proposed a startling corollary; God "reckons as a priest any layperson who performs the work of a priest," construed here as the propagation of righteousness.⁶⁰ If the layperson is transformed into a living sacrifice, he is a priest, according to Colet's lecture on Corinthians, not by virtue of the sacrament of holy orders but by virtue of his death to worldliness sealed in the sacrament of the altar.⁶¹ The notions, then, surfaced at Oxford but were developed only in *De sacramentis*. The advance is achieved there because Colet placed at the very heart of God's plan for the assimilation of all creation and hence at the center of his own concerns the idea that the priesthood and the sacraments spread righteousness by "making priests," "*sacerdotium sacerdotificans*."⁶²

The priest might summon or attract peers to this priesthood of believers with his own exemplary behavior. The sacraments were essentially confirmations of this "priest-making." "*Sacerdotificans*" was itself exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit, which ubiquitously in the church

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ For example, *Opera Dionysii*, p. 258, holds fast to differences in rank in *ecclesia militante*. Moreover, "Diversitas et ordo hic in ecclesia militante imago est ordinis illius quem ecclesia triumphans est habitura in celis. Sacerdos itaque quis habetur iustior laico, is mortuus dum parentatur, in medio choro inter sacerdotes statuatur. ...ut hoc ordine ammoniti alium in celis sacerdotibus locum, et sacriorem multo, quam laico datum esse credimus..." Also see n. 40 above.

⁶⁰ *Opuscula*, p. 228.

⁶¹ *Ad Corinthios*, p. 243

⁶² *De sacramentis*, p. 35.

tamed human nature's self-seeking.⁶³ Repeatedly at Oxford, Colet attributed the common sympathies and aspirations of the church's best citizens to the "*imperium*" of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴

There is one spirit in all. All are in the one spirit which is of Christ. What is in the lowest member is in all members. Thus there is common feeling, common grief, and common joy. Where the spirit grieves or rejoices, it does so everywhere.... Even when the occasion for grief is not shared, the feeling is shared by virtue of the spiritual unity. In the spirit, all are one in God who is fully present to all who are one so that they may be united to him in common feeling, wisdom, will, desires, and actions.⁶⁵

Carried to its extreme, this sentiment necessarily rendered distinctions between cleric and layperson provisional. *De sacramentis* reached precisely this extreme, at which the priest, "*sacerdotificans*," scrupulously guarded the sacraments from persons insufficiently purged of worldliness but also faithfully assimilated worthy recipients into the life of the church, indeed, into the priesthood. Erasmus, to some extent, equivocated and disassociated the church's desired spirituality from sacramental observances. Colet was virtually incapable of thinking of righteousness and spirituality without the church's rites of purgation, illumination, confirmation, and perfection.⁶⁶ The increase in spirituality, for Colet, was proportional to the propagation of the priesthood, which signified that each Christian shared with every other the spiritual life of the entire church, and this communion, in turn, fashioned a stable church.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 94. Also, for earlier remarks on the spirit's work in the church, consult *Opuscula*, pp. 263-264; *Ad Romanos*, p. 187; *Ad Corinthios*, pp. 162, 230, 234, 239, 246-249; and *Opera Dionysii*, p. 192.

⁶⁴ *Opuscula*, pp. 187-188; *Ad Romanos*, p. 184; and *Ad Corinthios*, pp. 221-222.

⁶⁵ *Opuscula*, p. 194: "Tam est spiritus unus qui est in omnibus; tam sunt omnes in spiritu uno qui est Christi. Quod est infimo membro, id idem est in omnibus. Hinc est quod sensus dolorque communis est, communeque gaudium. Atque ubi spiritus dolet, ubique dolet; ubi gaudet, simul ubique gaudet: id est facit dolere et gaudere: ...et ubi non est communis lesio, est tamen ex unitate spiritus communis sensus; quia spiritu omnia unum sunt in Deo, qui adest totus omnibus, in se unus, et omnia in se uniantur, sensu, sapientia, voluntate, studiis, actionibusque communibus."

⁶⁶ For Erasmus and Colet on sacraments, see Kaufman, "John Colet and Erasmus" *Enchiridion*" pp. 309-312; but also note, on sacraments and the principle of accommodation, Emile V. Telle, *Erasmus de Rotterdam et le septième sacrement* (Geneva, 1954) p. 378, note 32. Despite its assumption that Erasmus was rather stubbornly attached to a favorable view of *meritum de congruo*, John B. Payne's *Erasmus, His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond, 1970) is a most useful summary of the humanist's position.

⁶⁷ *De sacramentis*, pp. 78-80.

III

For Colet, “*sacerdotificans*” was the sign of a vital, spiritual church. There could never be too many “priests.” Thomas More, however, brooded that it was far easier to scold and condemn criminous clerics than to find and ordain more scrupulous replacements.⁶⁸ Colet and More were thinking here of two different “clergy.” Colet, in this instance, was the dreamer, and his “priesthood of believers” seems better suited to his friend’s *Utopia* than to the London they shared. Thomas More reflected realistically on the difficulty of staffing the church with virtuous as well as capable men, a problem that may have accounted, as Margaret Bowker suggests, for the church’s unwillingness to deprive clerical offenders and to settle instead, in cases that appear to call for unsparing condemnation, for public penance.⁶⁹

The clemency of ecclesiastical courts and the consequent failure of the “ordinary wayes” of canon law to purge the church of mischief may also have been due, in part, to the recognition that priests and deacons were, in Reginald Pecock’s words, “mad of oon lump of mater descending from Adam.” Bishop Pecock’s *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* acknowledged that “preestis ben born undir coniunccions and constellacions stiring and moving into as greet freelines and badde maners as others lay men ben born, and also presstis ben of as badde kindeli complexions moving into badde and scharpe passions as ben lay men.”⁷⁰ More than fifty years before Colet and More met, Pecock insisted that the occasional misconduct of clerics did not necessarily impair their “witt” or intelligence. A good expositor of scripture need not live flawlessly. Experience, he claimed, yielded numerous examples of revelations mediated by persons of otherwise disreputable behavior.⁷¹ Neither Pecock’s defense

⁶⁸ More’s *Apology* repeats Livy’s story of Calavius’s rescue of the Capuan senate. The population would have slaughtered their senators for “covetouse and cruell deling” and handed over the city to Hannibal, but Calavius betrayed this intention to the senate, and then he himself addressed the angry mob. Calavius advised only that the people must “set some better men in their places” before dispatching the senators. But for each name of a citizen drawn in lottery, voices were raised in protest (“an evyll and a noughtye man”). The senate was saved, for none better could be formed. It is no great thing, More extrapolated, to find fault with a governing body, senate or episcopacy, but for most prelates, considered individually, replacements who would also be improvements would be difficult to locate. See *Complete Works of Thomas More*, 9, pp. 79-82.

⁶⁹ Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1495-1502* (Cambridge, U.K., 1968) pp. 118-119.

⁷⁰ Reginald Pecock, *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London, 1860) 2.449-451. See especially E. F. Jacob’s Raleigh Lecture, “Reynold Pecock, Bishop of Chichester,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 37 (1951) 121-153, but also note V. H. H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock, A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 1945) and, for several suggestive remarks on Pecock and Colet, Arthur B. Ferguson, “Reginald Pecock and the Renaissance Sense of History,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 13 (1966) pp. 147-165.

⁷¹ Pecock, *Repressor*, 1.93-96.

of the church, tempered by admissions of clerical fallibility, nor Thomas More's argument for some degree of toleration placated critics. One suspects that Colet himself was not consoled by the first and, had he lived to hear the second, that he would not have been persuaded by his friend's more pragmatic considerations. Pecock and More justified irregularities in the church, to some extent, by referring respectively to the limitations of the flesh and to the problems of institutional management. Colet's ecclesiastical hierarchy was somehow above all this, and the secret of the apparent popularity of his preaching lies in this detachment. Uncompromising idealism is seldom practical but commonly appealing.

Colet's whole career was a protest against worldliness. His vision of a universal, spiritual *sacerdotium* had not taken final shape when, in the Oxford lectures, he reiterated St. Paul's warnings against the intrusion of the world's concerns and dispositions into the life of the church.⁷² In this context, Pecock's exoneration of clerics "moving into badde and scharpe passious as ben lay men" and More's explanation of the complexity of managerial concerns would have been meaningless. Curses of the flesh and of institutionalization were, for Colet, obstacles to be overcome rather than enduring difficulties that somehow mitigated clerical culpability and understandably retarded church reform on a grand scale. Worldliness and contention must be purged from the life of churchmen and from their communion. *De sacramentis* reiterated the arguments that appeared intermittently in Colet's Oxford compositions and enumerated, in what seems to be an ascending order of importance, St. Paul's didactic remonstrances. The apostle had urged Ephesians to love their wives; but when marriages were principally affairs of the flesh, spirituality in the household and the church was debased.⁷³ Colet recalled that elsewhere St. Paul ventured a more explicit and sweeping prohibition, "*neminem cognovimus secundum carnem.*"⁷⁴ A compact survey of Pauline spirituality follows in *De sacramentis* and culminates with the imperative to accept Christ's cross and "put on" an entirely new attitude toward worldly concerns.⁷⁵ This refers to, and leads directly to a discussion of, the purpose of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, namely, to place the layperson in an altogether different life.⁷⁶ Earlier in *De sacramentis*, Colet had conceded that "the whole priestly office wishes nothing other than the reduction ("*purgationem*") of diversity to unity, the illumination of the benighted, and finally the fulfillment of those who had been wanting in perfect [spirituality]."⁷⁷ He had little sense that churchmen might persistently have difficulty shaking the clay from their feet. Sanctification conferred something of an immunity and a unique status on initiated, illumined, and perfected laypersons. They were thereafter

⁷² E.g. *Ad Romanos*, p. 176.

⁷³ *De sacramentis*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

"priests," offering their righteousness as a "living sacrifice" and thus extending the rule of righteousness and the "*imperium*" of the Holy Spirit.

The question at hand is not whether this vision found its way into Colet's preaching *ad populum*. The notion of "*sacerdotificans*" and the uncompromising idealism which it represents are too pervasive in *De sacramentis* to permit us to assume its effective suppression elsewhere. The question is rather how Colet's presumably cautious and restrained expressions were received in London, and at least a tentative response may be coaxed now from what is known of *De sacramentis* and from the fragmentary record of Lollard admiration and episcopal opposition.

Doubts about Colet's influence on London's more daring malcontents will always remain. His reputation among Lollards, already reconstructed from the few clues left to us, would seem to confirm some connection between lay protests in London and the lost sermons of the Dean of St. Paul's. Furthermore, this suggests that the more radical remarks in *De sacramentis* found their way to the pulpit. This is not to say that Colet mounted, supported, or conspired in a campaign to unseat clerics, either for particular crimes or as a general principle of policy. Nevertheless, he did believe that evidence of righteousness empowered the laity, and this alone would have emboldened London's community of dissidents, who, according to Claire Cross, wrote a notable chapter in the struggle for lay supremacy in the church.⁷⁸ It would not be incorrect to take Elisabeth Sampson's irreverence for "that bred that some prestes doth minister at the Alter when thei be not in clene lyff" as only a vulgarization, not a distortion, of Colet's own Donatist insistence in *De sacramentis* that heaven's blessings can only be communicated by virtuous priests.⁷⁹ However suggested from the pulpit and interpreted in the pews, Colet's equation of sanctification with "*sacerdotificans*" could not but have been a welcome addition to the Lollards' arsenal of ideas.

Colet seems never to have expressed himself favorably with respect to the "marveyulous folysshenes" of London's Lollards. He appears to have remained silent when Richard Hunne's refusal in 1511 to pay the mortuary demanded for his infant son's funeral became a *cause célèbre*. Sued for payment, unofficially proscribed and "accursed," Hunne countersued in the king's courts for *praemunire*. The irascible Bishop Fitzjames

⁷⁸ Claire Cross, *Church and People, 1415-1660: The Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1976). But also consult, for criticism of Cross and A. G. Dickens, Christopher Haigh, "Some Aspects of the Recent Historiography of the English Reformation," *Stadtbürgertum und Adel in der Reformation*, ed. Wolfgang T. Mommsen (Stuttgart, 1979) pp. 92-95. Dickens anticipated and replied to some of the most damaging criticism in his "Heresy and the Origins of English Protestantism," *Britain and the Netherlands*, vol. 2, ed. J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossman (Groningen, 1964) pp. 47-66.

⁷⁹ *De sacramentis*, pp. 91-92.

charged Hunne with heresy and imprisoned him in 1514 in Lollard's Tower, a short distance from Colet's residence. Fitzjames's chancellor, William Horsey, was implicated in Hunne's mysterious death.⁸⁰ Through all this, Colet is not known to have uttered a word. H. C. Porter is inclined to think that Colet simply had no tolerance for lay grievances that menaced traditional ecclesiastical prerogatives. "Obsessively" fearful for *libertas ecclesiae*, he would have especially resented Hunne's *praemunire*.⁸¹ The situation, however, is slightly more complicated. Not only Hunne but church authorities as well, in this instance, violated Colet's sense of right and wrong, as it has come here to be understood. The church's legal right and legal standing could well have been unimpeachable, but, for all Colet cared, the church was wrong to have taken Hunne to court, even to ecclesiastical court. Disagreements in the spiritual estate were "settled" at the altar where the communion's common aspirations and mutual love were shaped and sealed by the Holy Spirit in the sacraments. No single litigant, but the whole chaos of litigation distressed Colet. Had he been, as Porter suggests, an obsessive and scrupulous guardian of *libertas ecclesiae*, he would surely have joined or led the chorus of official protests against parliament's abridgement of clerical privilege in 1512.⁸² But there is no sign that Colet broke his silence on behalf of the church or the Commons.

Colet's apparent silence was unable to purchase his peace. Henry Standish did no better with his militant support of parliament's position that criminous clerics in minor orders could be left to the king's justice and

⁸⁰ See Arthur G. Ogle, *The Tragedy of Lollards' Tower* (Oxford, 1949); and John Fines, "The Post-Mortem Condemnation for Heresy of Richard Hunne," *English Historical Review* 78 (1963) pp. 528-531.

⁸¹ H. C. Porter, "The Gloomy Dean and the Law: John Colet, 1466-1519," *Essays in Modern English Church History*, eds. G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (New York, 1966) pp. 18-43.

⁸² Henry VII's parliaments restricted and, in cases of treason, withdrew "benefit of clergy," developments that Leona Gabel considered a "drastic reform." See S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (Berkeley, 1972) p. 243 and Leona Gabel, *Benefit of Clergy in the Late Middle Ages*, *Smith College Studies in History* 14 (1928-1929) pp. 87, 124. But the statute of 1512 (4 Henry VIII, cap. 2) blamed recidivism on the ease with which criminous clerics could escape severe punishment and deprived clerics in minor orders of the privilege of having penalties assigned in ecclesiastical courts (and lifted upon compurgation). The statute also removed, to some degree, the rights of sanctuary. Peter Heath has contended that recidivism was, on the whole, infrequent, though privilege of clergy had been claimed, and presumably abused, by persons whose only connection with the minor orders of the church was tenuous. See Heath's *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969) pp. 120-121, 188. Clerical protest against the statute was significant and effective, and the privilege was restored by the next parliament (1515). Consult Richard J. Schoeck, "Common Law and Canon Law in Their Relationship to Thomas More," *St. Thomas More: Action and Contemplation*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven, 1972) pp. 25-26 and J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Affairs of Richard Hunne and Friar Standish," *Complete Works of Thomas More* 9, 215-216.

denied appeal to ecclesiastical court without prejudice to the church.⁸³ Standish, provincial of the Franciscan order, was taken by some of his episcopal accusers to have reversed the common defense of papal intervention *ratione peccati* in European politics.⁸⁴ To be more explicit, they blamed him for seditiously spreading the notion that laypersons, purportedly "without sin" ("*absque peccato*"), could set and enforce standards for clerical conduct.⁸⁵ Standish denied that his logic had either reached or rested on that generalization. But if this proposal lay at the center of parliament's legislation, the then silent Colet could perhaps have been blamed, not unfairly, for the disappearance of clerical privileges. *De sacramentis* gave great powers to the layperson, purged, initiated, and perfected ("*absque peccato*," he might have said). Furthermore, Colet had commissioned this new "priestly people" to extend the rule of righteousness and then made clerical power and privilege wholly dependent upon this task. It is not at all surprising that by 1513 Bishop Fitzjames was searching for sedition in the sermons preached at St. Paul's. Notwithstanding Erasmus's disclaimers and his partisan account of the bishop's "persecution," it would have been surprising only if Fitzjames had not found what he was looking for.⁸⁶

It is possible that Fitzjames's dislike of Colet was unrelated, at first, to the Hunne and Standish embarrassments. The Dean of St. Paul's, it seems, was too fastidious to have been popular with his associates. Memories of the 1512 "reformation sermon," still fresh when the church received reports of Hunne's *praemunire* and of Standish's support of Commons, were unlikely to cool tempers and calm fears about the reliability of Colet's support during these crises. His connection with outspoken Lollard dissent and with parliament's restriction of clerical immunities may only have been secured in the minds of those already hostile to him.

⁸³ Robert Keilwey, *Reports d'ascuns Cases*, ed. Jean Croke (London, 1688) p. 183r: "Et le dit Doctor Standishe perceivant per le bill, et per le manner de lour [the bishops in convocation] demeanor que ils avoyant malice a luy, et que lour principall cause ne fuit auter, mes pur cause de son opinion en maintenance del temporall jurisdiction de noltre Seignior le Roy . . ." Et aury il perceiva ouster que lour entent fuit per reason de lour grande power de luy convicte de heresie, et que il ne fuit able de resister lour malice, per que il vient a nostre dit Seignior le Roy pur son aide." The king did, in fact, intervene. Standish was spared and made Bishop of St. Asaph in 1518. See William E. Wilkie, *The Cardinal Protectors of England* (Cambridge, U.K., 1974) pp. 158-159 on the provision of Standish, over and above Wolsey's objections.

⁸⁴ See William D. McCready, "Papalists and Antipapalists: Aspects of the Church/State Controversy in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator* 6 (1975) pp. 241-273.

⁸⁵ Keilwey, *Reports d'ascuns Cases*, 183v-184r.

⁸⁶ *Opus Epistolarum* 4.524. Thomson, *Later Lollards*, p. 252, cites this "prosecution" (though formal proceedings against Colet seem not to have amounted to much) as evidence that the church was alert and especially "on guard against challenges to its authority." *The Victoria History of London*, vol. 1, ed. William Page (London, 1974) p. 236, closely associates Fitzjames's opposition with Lollard attendance at St. Paul's. Thomson is more cautious. He suspects simply that the same ideas that attracted dissenters annoyed Colet's theologically more conservative bishop.

Certainly, *a silentiis*, no direct involvement with Hunne or Standish can now be proven. Without his sermons *ad populum*, we shall never know how truly subversive he had become. That he was perceived as subversive, however, is not only plausible—based on inferences from *De sacramentis*—but also is documented in his correspondence with Erasmus. There is indication that in 1513 Colet was suspended from preaching for several months.⁸⁷ By 1514, he was so deeply saddened by events and antagonisms that he contemplated retirement among the Carthusians.⁸⁸ Two years later, Archbishop Warham, his protector and friend, appears to have joined with his episcopal opponents in calling for some censorship.⁸⁹ If Colet escaped further humiliation, it may have been because *De sacramentis* and his other official pronouncements constituted a strong case for the hierarchy, for clergy and sacraments, on which few could have improved. Lollards and episcopal adversaries would hardly have missed the radical implications of Colet's criticisms and of his understanding of "*sacerdotificans*." But *De sacramentis* is also a tissue of arguments for the provisional preservation of the ecclesiastical order.⁹⁰ The Christian's righteousness was incomplete, said Colet, "*nisi medio sacramento ministrato a ministris Dei*."⁹¹ Freed from the tyranny of temptation and worldly concern, the layperson became a "priest," but the gateway to freedom was the sacramental order of the church and the gatekeepers were the ordained clergy.⁹² Elisabeth Sampson would have had none of this. "God cannot be both in hevyn and in erthe," therefore, the bread at the altar after consecration remained "but bred."⁹³ In Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, written shortly after his return to the continent

⁸⁷ P. S. Allen, "Dean Colet and Archbishop Warham," *English Historical Review* 17 (1902) p. 306. The alleged suspension is customarily identified as the "*molestia negotiorum*" of *Opus epistolarum* 1.527.

⁸⁸ *Opus epistolarum* 2.37.

⁸⁹ Warham had resigned as chancellor of the realm in 1515, and this "release" is what Erasmus may well have had in mind the following year, *Opus epistolarum* 2.246: "*Gaudeo N. ereptum e carcere regio*." If this is so, and Allen's argument to that effect (n. 87 above) is not implausible, the description of N's (Warham's) betrayal of Colet must be taken seriously: "*...cum is semper a Coletio inter amicissimos habitus, cum iam amicus urgeretur episcoporum calumniis, ab illius adversariis steterit*." Two problems persist with respect to this apparent change in Warham's loyalties, or more precisely, with respect to the identification of "N" with Warham, and it would be foolish to leave them unmentioned. The story of Warham's betrayal was not included in Erasmus's encomiastic sketch of Colet's life, a document often cited to confirm Warham's patronage and friendship for the Dean of St. Paul's. This may simply have been a tactical omission. More damaging, however, is the statement that Colet obtained N's (Warham's?) "release" (*Opus epistolarum* 2.246: "*Amo coleti tam Christianum animum; nam ejus unius opera liberatum audio*"). There is no evidence whatsoever that Colet played any prominent part in Warham's resignation. Perhaps Warham was not "N." The most that can be said with certainty is that some "amicissimus," whom Colet once supported, had taken up with Colet's enemies.

⁹⁰ E.g., *De sacramentis*, p. 37.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 82-85.

⁹³ Pollard, *Reign of Henry VII*, p. 244.

from Colet's Oxford, the sacraments were little more than well-intentioned deceits, props for weaker Christians but generally expendable for laypersons sufficiently strong to achieve the spiritual life.⁹⁴ But, for Colet, the hierarchy was indispensable. His was, in essence, what Bernd Moeller once called a "feudal" Christianity, retaining sacramentally the distance between ordained clergy and the laity.⁹⁵

John Colet, nevertheless, cannot be excluded from the discussion of prereformation anticlerical sentiment, which has had much to do with the likes of Sampson and Erasmus. His uncompromising idealism prohibited him from entering the conspiracy of silence, mistaken today for clerical indifference to the deterioration of the conduct of church leadership and church life. Yet the silence forced upon him by our inability to reconstruct with precision what he preached in London complicates the task of placing him in one or another category otherwise useful for the classification of anticlerical remarks.⁹⁶ *De sacramentis* and the little we know of Colet's London friends and enemies bring a solution within sight, if not in clear focus. Colet did not share the "anticlericalism of heresy," though he may have been heard to have advocated the rights of the righteous laity and to have expanded their role in the reform of the church. And if Erasmus and Thomas More are said to lodge comfortably in the column reserved for "idealistic and religious anticlericalism," another "type" must be found for their friend Colet. He believed that the "ordinary wayes" of canon law and church council were adequate for the revival of clerical discipline. But he held that a reorientation of considerable scope was necessary for the church to perform its appointed role in the extension of righteousness and the *assimilatio deo* of the created order.

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⁹⁴ *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Hajo Holborn (Munich, 1933) pp. 24, 28, 83-87, 98-99, 117-118, 132-133.

⁹⁵ Bernd Moeller, "Frömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 56 (1965) p. 29.

⁹⁶ See J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (London, 1976) pp. 319-321; but also note William W. MacDonald, "Anticlericalism, Protestantism, and the English Reformation," *Journal of Church and State* 15 (1973) 28-30. MacDonald has done little more than compress the four types of anticlericalism from Scarisbrick's first edition ([London, 1968] pp. 243-244) into three, but his discussion of other literature, *inter alia*, Gasquet, Froude, Pollard, and Hughes, is helpful (especially pp. 21-26). In addition to the classifications mentioned here, viz., "of heresy" and "idealistic and religious," Scarisbrick lists the "negative and destructive" anticlericalism associated with local antipathies but not always with Lollardy and "idealistic and secular" anticlericalism principally represented by Thomas Cromwell. The relationship between this last category and early Tudor clerical anticlericalism is the subject of my forthcoming monograph.