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Colet, Wolsey and the Politics of Reform: St Paul's Cathedral in 1518*

BUILDING upon my recent research concerning John Colet's reform efforts as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral from 1505 to 1519,¹ this article specifically concerns the significance of the dean's final attempt at clerical reform in 1518 when, following his entrance into political life as a royal councillor and ally of Cardinal Wolsey (1472–1530), he proposed amendments to the existing cathedral statutes concerning residence and behaviour of cathedral clergy and staff.² Between 1515 and 1518, Colet's political associations gave him unprecedented access to ecclesiastical power superior to his own, which he attempted to use for the purposes of clerical reform.³ Consequently, Colet compiled extracts from the pre-existing cathedral statutes, adding comments of his own, and moreover endeavoured to enlist Cardinal Wolsey's help in proposing fresh statute reform at St Paul's in 1518.⁴ Contrary to existing

*This article began as a paper delivered to the Reformation Studies Colloquium at Birmingham University in April 2004. My thanks go to Dr David Crankshaw for his assistance and advice. Any faults are entirely my own.

1. J. Arnold, 'John Colet, Preaching and Reform at St Paul's Cathedral, 1505–19', *Historical Research*, lxxvi (2003), 450–68; J. Arnold, 'John Colet and a Lost Manuscript of 1506', *History*, lxxxix (2004), 174–92; idem, 'In Search of Perfection: Ecclesiology in the Life and Works of John Colet, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, 1505–1519' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London University, 2004).

2. *Registrum Statutorum et Consuetudinum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Sancti Pauli Londinensis*, ed. W. S. Simpson (1873), 217–48; W. Dugdale, *A History of St Paul's Cathedral in London, from its Foundation Until these Times* (1658), 237–68.

3. J. A. Guy, *The Cardinal's Court: The Impact of Thomas Wolsey in Star Chamber* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1977), 36–7; *Acts of Court of the Mercers' Company, 1453–1527*, ed. L. Lyell and F. D. Watney (Cambridge, 1936), 440, 441, 454, 466, 486, 495, 519–21, 527. McConica's argument that English humanists influenced Henrician reform policy has been persuasively refuted by Elton, Dickens and Fox: see J. K. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics Under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford, 1965; 2nd edn, Oxford, 1967), *passim*; G. R. Elton's review of McConica's book in *Historical Journal*, x (1967), 137–8; A. G. Dickens's review of the same in *History*, lii (1967), 77–8; A. Fox, 'English Humanism and the Body Politic', in A. Fox and J. Guy, *Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics and Reform, 1500–1550* (Oxford, 1986), 34–51.

4. *Registrum*, 217–48: Colet's statute amendments, labelled *Epitome* occupy 217–36; his 1518 proposals, named *Exhibita*, occupy 237–48.

EHR, cxxi. 493 (Sept. 2006)

scholarship,⁵ I argue that both Colet's statute additions and his proposed reforms were based upon his sacramental and hierarchical ecclesiology; that his recourse to an archbishop, who was also a legate *a latere*, was entirely consistent with his ecclesiological emphases on hierarchy and episcopal authority; that neither his comments nor his 1518 proposals can be called statutes because they were not implemented as such; that his ideas were probably never submitted to the cathedral body for consideration; and that, although Wolsey produced statutes for St Paul's, they were not based upon Colet's proposals.⁶ My arguments are based upon an analysis of the following documented facts.

Increasingly ill during the latter years of his tenure as dean, and also embroiled in politics, Colet compiled two separate sets of disciplinary rules concerning canonical residence and the behaviour of other clergy and lay staff.⁷ The first set, comprising extracts from the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cathedral statutes, produced by Deans Ralph de Baldock (1294–1304) and Thomas Lisieux (1441–56), relate to the duties of the dean, canons, minor canons, vicars and virgers. The extracts are interspersed with some comments written by Colet himself, concerning the subjects with which the extracts deal. These extracts have been described, by Simpson in his 1873 edition, as an *Epitome*,⁸ of the pre-existing laws, and will therefore be labelled as such within this article. The *Epitome* is undated. However, the second set of rules, dated 1 September 1518, comprises a series of *Exhibita*, that is to say proposals concerning the residentiary canons that were exhibited to Wolsey for his approbation, in the hope that, with his support, they could then be presented to the cathedral chapter for consideration as potential

5. D. Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterdami*, i–iv, ed. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen (Oxford, 1906–22), iv, 517; idem, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus with The Life of Erasmus by Beatus Rhenanus*, ed. and trans. J. C. Olin (New York, 1965; 2nd edn, New York, 1975), 178; J. Foxe, *John Foxe's Book of Martyrs 1583: Acts and Monuments of Matters Most Speciall and Memorable* [STC 11225]: facsimile edition for CD ROM by D. G. Newcombe and M. Pidd (Oxford, 2001), vol. ii, book VII, 838–9; S. Knight, *The Life of Dr John Colet, Dean of St Paul's, in the Reigns of K. Henry VII and K. Henry VIII and Founder of St Paul's School: With an Appendix Containing Some Account of the Masters and More Eminent Scholars of that Foundation, and Several Original Papers Relating to the Said Life* (1724; 2nd edn, 1823), 199–7; F. Seebohm, *The Oxford Reformers of 1498: Being a History of the Fellow-Work of John Colet, Erasmus and Thomas More* (1867; 3rd edn, 1896), 1–43; H. H. Milman, *The Annals of St Paul's Cathedral* (1868; 2nd edn, 1869), 112–24; Dean Mansell, see *Registrum*, xlvii (n. 1); J. H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet, DD* (1887; 2nd edn, 1909), 132–9; J. A. R. Marriott, *The Life of John Colet* (1933), 119; H. Maynard Smith, *Pre-Reformation England* (1938), 108; E. W. Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology* (1956), 50–6; E. F. Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', in W. R. Matthews and W. M. Atkins (eds), *A History of St Paul's Cathedral and the Men Associated with it* (1957), 100–71, esp. 106–16; J. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley, 1989), 241.

6. As described by Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 114–15.

7. *Registrum*, 217–48. This does not include Colet's lost 1506 injunctions for minor clergy and chantry priests: see W. S. Simpson, 'A Newly Discovered Manuscript Containing Statutes Compiled by Dean Colet for the Government of Chantry Priests and Other Clergy in St Paul's Cathedral', *Archaeologia*, lii (1890), 145–74.

8. By Simpson in *Registrum*, 217.

additions to the statutes.⁹ The *Exhibita* concern only the residentiary canons and are largely freshly composed proposals, but bear some resemblance to the *Epitome*. The original manuscripts of the *Epitome* and *Exhibita* are now lost, and copies are not apparently extant in any sixteenth-century manuscripts. Both texts were reproduced, faithfully or otherwise, by Dugdale in 1658 and by Simpson in 1873.¹⁰ Colet's purpose in producing the *Epitome* is obscure. It is apparent, however, that his *Exhibita* were intended to become statutes, but failed to do so because Wolsey withheld his support.¹¹ By the end of 1518, Colet's declining health prevented further reform attempts during his lifetime.¹² He died, in September 1519, without contributing to the St Paul's statute books.¹³

The scholarship surrounding this period of Colet's career is confused. However, all historians investigating this episode have rightly concluded that his reform efforts of 1518 were a failure. For instance, Milman stated that the proposals 'were, at the time, and remained ever after, a dead letter'; Lupton declared that 'He failed – if the failure is to be called his, and not theirs [the cathedral chapter's]'; Hunt observed that 'Colet's efforts to reform St Paul's were unavailing'; and Gleason notes that 'no one was interested in seconding his proposals'.¹⁴ Nevertheless, significant mistakes have been made in assessments of Colet's later years and, as a consequence, false conclusions have been drawn, which have been passed on from one generation of scholars to the next: from Erasmus's exaggeration that the dean 'restored the decayed discipline of the cathedral body' to Gleason's conclusion that 'administrative experience had given him [Colet] a healthy respect for the obstructive capabilities of a cathedral chapter'.¹⁵

Scholarship concerning Colet's projected statute alterations has caused confusion by its failure to acknowledge the differences between the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita*, in terms of their dates of composition, contents and styles.¹⁶ Regarding nomenclature, for instance, Lupton variously labelled Colet's *Epitome* as 'ordinances', 'statutes' and a 'revised code'.¹⁷ As we shall see, these terms cannot properly apply to Colet's work. Lupton also randomly referred to both the *Epitome* and

9. Ibid., 237–48.

10. Dugdale, *A History*, 237–68; *Registrum*, 217–48. For simplicity's sake, only the *Registrum* will be cited hereafter.

11. Ibid., 220–2.

12. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 520; Olin, Erasmus, 181.

13. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 527; Olin, Erasmus, 190; Seebohm, *Oxford Reformers*, 461–70, 503–5.

14. Milman, *Annals*, 124; Lupton, *A Life*, 137; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 55; Gleason, *John Colet*, 241.

15. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 517; Olin, Erasmus, 178; Gleason, *John Colet*, 241.

16. Seebohm, *Oxford Reformers*, 1–43; Milman, *Annals*, 112–24; Lupton, *A Life*, 132–9; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 50–6; Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 106–16; Gleason, *John Colet*, 241.

17. Lupton, *A Life*, 132–3, 137.

the *Exhibita* as 'statutes', leaving the reader in the dark as to the distinctive content of each document and uncertain as to which text he was referring at any one time. Marriott wrongly described Colet's *Exhibita* as 'a revised version of the Statutes and Customs of St. Paul's'; in fact, Colet freshly composed most of the *Exhibita*. Hunt decided that Erasmus's reference to the dean's alleged restoration of the 'decayed discipline of the Cathedral' must have referred to 'Colet's Cathedral Statutes, which embodied "with many omissions and adaptations, the earlier ones of Baldock and Lisieux"'.¹⁸ Only the *Epitome* fits the latter part of this description. Thus Hunt, following Lupton, must have been referring to the *Epitome* rather than to the *Exhibita*. However, as we shall see, Colet never successfully promulgated any cathedral statutes, so Hunt's terminology is inaccurate. Gleason omits to distinguish between the two works in question, referring only to 'statutes':

Colet ... took it upon himself to tighten discipline in the chapter, and for that purpose he drafted statutes for the governance of the cathedral clergy ... Fitzjames never 'commended' his statutes ... Wolsey, equally judiciously, 'witnessed' the statutes but did not sign them.¹⁹

Gleason therefore appears to be unaware of the distinction between the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita*. Moreover, there is no evidence of Fitzjames's involvement with either work.²⁰

Similar confusion exists concerning the compositional date of the *Epitome*. Hunt implied that the 'statutes', meaning in this case the *Epitome*, as is evident by his references to Simpson's edition of the same²¹ – were composed relatively early on in Colet's tenure as dean, thus confusing them with Colet's 1506 injunctions. For instance, Hunt declared that, upon his arrival, 'St. Paul's was being desecrated by all kinds of profanation' and that the new dean therefore 'set about putting the house in order', implying that he did so immediately.²² Gleason gives no indication of when he considers the 'statutes', meaning either the *Epitome* or the *Exhibita*, to have been composed. Indeed, his chronology of events is very muddled. After stating that Wolsey had failed to sign the statutes (i.e. the 1518 *Exhibita*) that he had witnessed (i.e. read), Gleason declares that

Refusing to concede defeat, Colet nevertheless threw himself ... into a fray ... In his frustration he adopted such measures as lay within his power.

18. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 516: 'collegii sui collapsam disciplinam sarsit'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 51, quoting Lupton, *A Life*, 132.

19. Gleason, *John Colet*, 241, quoting respectively from Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 114 for 'commended' and *Registrum*, 418–19 for 'witnessed'.

20. Gleason, *John Colet*, 241.

21. Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 51–6; *Registrum*, 217–36.

22. Presumably soon after his appointment in 1505: A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500* (Oxford, 1957), i, 63; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 51.

One of the most resented of these was curtailing almost to the vanishing point [*sic*] what was then called hospitality.²³

Thus, Gleason mysteriously jumps from Wolsey's rejection of Colet's *Exhibita*, in September 1518 at the earliest, to Colet's withdrawal of decanal hospitality, which arguably began early in his tenure, around 1506,²⁴ and which was certainly commented upon by Fitzjames, in his accusations against Colet of 1513/14, long before the 1518 *Exhibita* were composed. More recent scholarship on the matter also confuses Colet's 1518 reform efforts with those of 1506.²⁵ By contrast, Lupton's suggestion that the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita* were composed consecutively, and at a similar time, is the most probable reconstruction:

It would seem as if Colet had at first endeavoured to get his own revision of the statutes accepted by the bishop and chapter and, failing in that, had tried, as a last resource [*sic*], to invoke the legatine authority of Wolsey.²⁶

As Colet's invocation of Wolsey's authority was attempted in September 1518, Lupton plausibly implied that the *Epitome* was composed a short while beforehand.

The arguments for the conjectural compositional date of Colet's *Epitome* rely partly upon internal evidence, namely, the fact that certain textual passages appear in both the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita*, suggesting that they may have been composed nearly contemporaneously.²⁷ Moreover, the *Epitome* contains passages that are also found in Colet's statutes for St Paul's School, dated 18 June 1518, possibly indicating a similar compositional date for the two works.²⁸ It is unlikely, due to Colet's failing health, that the *Epitome* was written after September 1518. Furthermore, as we shall see below, the *Epitome* comprises extracts from the existing cathedral statutes together with commentary – a series of angry outbursts rather than a considered set of statute proposals. Thus, it is far from certain that Colet's *Epitome* was intended for anyone's attention except his own. By contrast, the *Exhibita* are a more measured set of proposals, specifically addressed to Cardinal Wolsey. Therefore, as Lupton suggested, the most plausible explanation is that the *Epitome* was composed before the *Exhibita*, but exactly when is indiscernible.

23. Gleason, *John Colet*, 242.

24. See Arnold, 'Lost Manuscript', 174–92.

25. V. Davis, 'The Lesser Clergy in the Later Middle Ages', in D. Keene, A. Burns and A. Saint (eds), *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London* (New Haven, 2004), 157–61.

26. Lupton, *A Life*, 132.

27. For instance, the phrase 'Is Omnes causas ad Capitulum spectantes audit' appears in the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita: Registrum*, 220, 237.

28. For instance, those passages concerning rules for the grammar master. See *Registrum*, 225: 'Magister Scholae vir probus et honestus debet esse, atque, multae et laudatae literaturae', compared with BL, Add. MS 6274, fo. iv: the grammar master should be a man 'hole in body, honest and vertuouse and lernyd in ... good and clene Laten literature', reprinted in Lupton, *A Life*, 272.

I argue that, given that the *Epitome*, *Exhibita* and school statutes contain material in common, the compositional dates of all three works were probably close together. Thus, I conjecture that the *Epitome* was composed sometime around 1518, along with the other two dated works. The significance of this probable dating is that the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita* provide evidence of Colet's continuing ecclesiological concern in his later years as dean, expressed roughly in his *Epitome*, but in a more refined style in the *Exhibita*. However, despite his close political association with Wolsey after 1515, his 1518 *Exhibita* remained unsigned by the cardinal and were therefore not presented to the cathedral chapter for consideration as potential statutes. Hence, whatever the compositional date of the *Epitome*, Colet's *Exhibita* of 1518 were a failure.

A further common misconception concerning Colet's 1518 work is that Wolsey drew up a series of statutes based upon, and inspired by, the dean's *Exhibita*:

On 1 September 1518, Colet presented a series of *Exhibita* to the Cardinal, these being a digest of the statutes, customs and regulations of the Cathedral; and intended to give the cardinal a picture of the overall situation. Wolsey saw the need for drastic action and himself drew up statutes – they are reproduced in Sparrow Simpson's *Registrum* – based upon those which Colet himself had prepared earlier.²⁹

The myth that Wolsey's statutes were based upon the *Exhibita* was handed down from Knight to subsequent scholars, apparently without scrutiny or contradiction.³⁰ For instance, a year before Carpenter's work was published, Hunt proclaimed that 'in 1518 he [Colet] presented to the Cardinal a collection of "Exhibita", which were used by the latter as the basis of his own Statutes'.³¹ In fact, as we shall see, a comparison between Wolsey's statutes and the *Exhibita* reveals that they are almost entirely different in content, structure and expression.³²

Another false assumption relates to William Warham's cathedral statutes of 1502, composed following his primary episcopal visitation, and mentioned in both the *Exhibita* and Wolsey's statutes. Relying on some anonymous late sixteenth-century memoranda, possibly written by a member of the cathedral clergy, Knight related that³³

Dean Nowell said to him [perhaps a canon] on his admission, that Warham's and Wolsey's were no Statutes, and that, in taking his oath to observe the Statutes, he must separate the leaves containing these from the rest of the volume ... Colet's *Exhibita* were made, he said, by the Dean alone 'then out with chapter', nor were they true, nor fairly collected. Wolsey's Statutes were

29. Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 114.

30. Knight, *The Life of Dr John Colet*, 199–207; Lupton, *A Life*, 133.

31. Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 56, following Lupton, *A Life*, 133.

32. *Registrum*, 217–48. Wolsey's statutes follow, on 249–63.

33. *Registrum*, xlix.

made by a stranger, not as the Pope's Legate, but by compromise; the Bishop of London's assent, and that of the Chapter, was not obtained to them; and there was no seal attached, but only the Cardinal's hand.³⁴

Carpenter, like several scholars before him,³⁵ saw this quotation as evidence not only that the Bishop of London and the cathedral chapter had rejected the *Exhibita*, but also that they had rejected Wolsey's and Warham's statutes.³⁶ However, the quotation is problematic in several ways: first, the source is not apparently extant; secondly, its authorship and provenance are unknown, which means that its authenticity and validity are questionable; thirdly, the source paraphrases, rather than quotes directly, what Nowell allegedly said, so its accuracy as a representation of what Nowell might have said is obscure – we do not even know when Nowell is supposed to have made these remarks, or when the memoranda were written down; fourthly, even if the passage accurately conveys Nowell's perception of Warham's, Wolsey's and Colet's work, it does not necessarily reveal anything about how their work was received in the early sixteenth century.

On the other hand, four pieces of evidence exist which suggest that Wolsey's and Warham's statutes *were* in force at St Paul's during the sixteenth century. First, with regard to Warham's 1502 statutes, both Colet and Wolsey referred to them as 'ordinationes', a term meaning 'statute' and used for the dean's own St Paul's School statutes of 1518.³⁷ Writing on the subject of the dean's residence, Colet referred to Warham's statutes as existing law: 'according to Bishop Warham's statutes'.³⁸ Wolsey mentioned Warham's statutes no fewer than six times in his own rules for St Paul's.³⁹ According to Colet and Wolsey, therefore, Warham's statutes were not only in force, but formed a precedent for further statute reform. Secondly, as Bishop of London, Warham possessed the authority to impose statute reform upon the institution.⁴⁰ If he had the power to promulgate new statutes, then it seems highly unlikely that he would have composed statutes without thereafter using that authority to have them adopted. The memoranda quoted by Simpson may therefore suggest that it was Nowell's personal wish that Warham's statutes should not be considered as legally binding; the evidence suggests that, at least in the early sixteenth century, they were believed to be in force. Thirdly, the quotation

34. Knight, *The Life of Dr John Colet*, 200, reprinted in Lupton, *A Life*, 133 and Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 55.

35. Knight, *The Life of Dr John Colet*, 199–207; Seebohm, *Oxford Reformers*, 389; Milman, *Annals*, 124; Lupton, *A Life*, 133; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 56.

36. Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 114.

37. *Registrum*, 251–3, 260, 262. For the school statutes, see BL, Add. MS 6274, fos 1r–11v.

38. *Registrum*, 238: 'secundum ordinationem Domini Warham Episcopi'.

39. *Ibid.*, 251, 252, 253 (twice), 260 and, for instance: 'juxta ordinationes dicti Domini Warham', 262.

40. *Ibid.*, 19.

suggests that Wolsey's and Warham's statutes were bound up with the rest of the cathedral's statutes in a single volume. Why this should have been the case, if they had not formally been promulgated, is not explained. A simple explanation is that they were, in fact, recognised as valid statutes by the chapter, but that Nowell categorically denied their validity.⁴¹ Fourthly, the quotation specifically refers to 'Wolsey's statutes', begging the question of why the writer would use the term if they had not been promulgated. This evidence thus buttresses the argument that both Warham's and Wolsey's statutes had been adopted, contrary to the suppositions of Knight, Milman, Lupton, Hunt and Carpenter.⁴²

In contrast to the foregoing myths concerning Colet's 'reform' activity, I argue below that his activities of 1518 were fundamentally ecclesiological. Not only is this fact evident in the ecclesiological content of his written work, but also in his deference to Cardinal Wolsey, which was consistent with his hierarchical understanding of the Church.⁴³ Relying upon revisionist and post-revisionist insights into Colet's thought, I suggest that his final reform efforts were motivated by his idealistic ecclesiological vision, and by his political involvement. I argue below that two important ecclesiological ingredients in the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita* were the ideas of sacrament and hierarchy. As we shall see now, Rex, Gleason and MacCulloch observed that the hierarchical and sacramental language of Pseudo-Dionysius heavily influenced Colet;⁴⁴ the consequence was his elevated view of the priesthood. Thus, we must interpret the events of 1518 within the context outlined by Rex:

Much of the evidence cited [concerning Colet] is literary, and such inherently ambivalent evidence has often been crudely interpreted ... Colet himself was anything but anti-clerical. He was an avid disciple of the late classical 'Pseudo Dionysius' whose writings on the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies coined the concept of 'hierarchy' (rule by priests) and put it into circulation. Colet regarded ordination as the paramount sacrament of the Church and was unhesitating in his elevation of spiritual authority and dignity over temporal. If he castigated the clergy, he did not spare the laity, assuring them they got the clergy they deserved.⁴⁵

Rex explains that Colet has been misrepresented through the crude interpretation of his written works and that the priesthood was of immense significance for his world-view. This is particularly true of Colet's final reform efforts. Furthermore, the *Epitome* and the *Exhibita*

41. For some reason now obscure.

42. Knight, *The Life of Dr John Colet*, 207; Milman, *Annals*, 124; Lupton, *A Life*, 133; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 56; Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485–1660', 114.

43. See Arnold, 'Preaching and Reform', 459–68.

44. Gleason, *John Colet*, 185–213.

45. R. Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (1993), 51–2.

must be examined within the context of the 'very high standards' that some clergy, including Colet, set themselves in the late-medieval period.⁴⁶ As MacCulloch observes, Colet, following Pseudo-Dionysius, believed that the 'Clergy had a solemn and inescapable duty to be as pure and effective ministers of God as the angels themselves. His apparently anti-clerical outpourings are in fact the highest form of clericalism.'⁴⁷ For the dean, the reason that such high standards were required was because the earthly priesthood was a reflection of Christ's priesthood and the celestial hierarchy:

Priests were entrusted with the awesome power of the divine light of grace ... Colet ... called on the priests of the Church to be no less than the angels in heaven as they ministered to the laity, for their priesthood was a reflection of Christ's priesthood, and the Eucharist that they celebrated was the chief means by which humanity made its encounter with the divine.⁴⁸

Here MacCulloch rightly acknowledges Gleason's cogent analysis of Colet's sacramental theology.⁴⁹ However, this article seeks to take MacCulloch's post-revisionist observations a stage further, by examining how Colet's sacramental and hierarchical ecclesiology was applied. Colet's ecclesiological elevation of the clergy was combined with insights inspired by his experience of Wolsey's Tudor politics, which rekindled the dean's hope that his perfectionist vision could be made a reality in his cathedral church. It is to this context of recent political involvement to which we now turn.

In the late-medieval and early-Tudor periods, 'politics' encompassed three main areas: Church, Court and law.⁵⁰ Wolsey was a versatile expert in all three spheres.⁵¹ Conversely, for most of his short life, Colet had been a non-political figure, having largely engaged, so far as is discernible, with one of these arenas: the Church;⁵² indeed, it remained his chief concern to his death. However, a series of incidents from 1515 to 1518 propelled Colet into the worlds of law and the Royal Council.⁵³ The initial reason for this involvement was his reputation as a preacher.⁵⁴

46. D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (2003), 33.

47. *Ibid.*, 34.

48. *Ibid.*, 477.

49. Gleason, *John Colet*, 185–213.

50. Guy, *The Cardinal's Court*, 28–9 for a list of clerics, knights and justices involved in politics.

51. A. F. Pollard, *Wolsey* (1929), 57; P. Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (1990), 58–68.

52. Except for his sermon on war in 1513: Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 526; Olin, Erasmus, 190.

53. Gleason, *John Colet*, 246–66.

54. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 523–8; Olin, Erasmus, 185–90; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 838; *L[etters and]P[apers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509–47, Preserved in the Public Record Office, The British Museum, and Elsewhere in England, Arranged and Catalogued by J. S. Brewer, M.A., Under the Direction of the Master of the Rolls, and with the sanction of Her Majesty's Secretaries of State; vol. i, parts I and II; vol. ii, parts I and II (1864; 2nd edn, 1920)]*, 1445, 1450, 1460, 1467, 1470, 1474: Colet preached many sermons to the king.

By virtue of this homiletic status, and particularly following his November 1515 delivery of a sermon at Wolsey's installation as cardinal, Colet became deeply involved in the affairs of both Wolsey and Henry VIII.⁵⁵ One consequence of the dean's political involvement was a renewed enthusiasm for reform, which, as we have seen, manifested itself between 1515 and 1518 in an ongoing dissatisfaction with clerical standards and in proposed statute reform. In order properly to contextualise Colet's last reform efforts, it is necessary to trace his political connections from 1515 onwards.

The roots of Colet's first participation in Tudor politics lay in a long-running dispute concerning the jurisdiction of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Kitching noted that

From the thirteenth century, archbishops of Canterbury had claimed some prerogative authority to grant probate and administration in cases where persons died with property or debts in more than one diocese.⁵⁶

In December 1515, in accordance with the king's request, Convocation appointed a committee consisting of Bishops Nykke of Norwich, Oldham of Exeter and Fisher of Rochester; the Prior of Canterbury; and Dean Colet.⁵⁷ The committee's brief was to investigate the Prerogative Court of Canterbury's right to jurisdiction over probate concerning lands lying outside testators' own dioceses.⁵⁸ However, with Colet's assistance, Wolsey used the committee for his own ends. As Gleason states, 'It was increasingly clear to Warham both that Colet was Wolsey's man and that Wolsey aimed to oust Warham from the chancellorship'.⁵⁹ By sitting on these committees, therefore, the dean had demonstrated his political allegiance to Wolsey. The Tudor chronicler Edward Hall suggested that Wolsey was a menace to Warham's position as chancellor and undermined his power, forcing Warham to resign as Lord Chancellor of England.⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, Wolsey soon became chancellor himself.⁶¹ Moreover, Colet was subsequently rewarded for his part in Wolsey's actions by his appointment to the

55. His sermons on war had drawn the king's attention to him, as had his sermon to Wolsey in 1515; College of Arms, London, MS W.C., fos 219r–220v: an account of Colet's sermon at Wolsey's Westminster Abbey installation as Cardinal in November 1515; Gleason, *John Colet*, 246–66.

56. C. Kitching, 'The Prerogative Court of Canterbury from Warham to Whitgift', in F. Heal and R. O'Day (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church in England, 1500–1642* (Leicester, 1976), 191–214 at 191–2.

57. Ibid.

58. Lupton, *A Life*, 226–7.

59. Ibid.

60. Pollard, *Wolsey*, 57; J. D. Mackie, *The Early Tudors, 1485–1558* (Oxford, 1952), 295; Gleason, *John Colet*, 256.

61. As soon as nine days after Warham's resignation, on 24 Dec. 1515 at the earliest: *ibid.*, 247.

King's Council.⁶² Gleason rightly suggests that the dean's work for Wolsey on the committee was directly linked to Colet's subsequent and swift promotion:

Though Colet's academic field was theology he was also reasonably well versed in the law ... Colet was thus suited from several points of view for the eminent place to which Wolsey now raised him, nothing less than a seat on the King's ... Council.⁶³

In order to understand the nature of Colet's political involvement, it will be helpful briefly to describe the nature and duties of a King's Councillor.⁶⁴

The King's Council was the medieval administrative and judicial body that met regularly in Star Chamber (or *Camera Stellata*) at the Palace of Westminster, in order to administer justice, and at court, in order to advise the king in political matters. The council tended to be large and consisted of three levels of councillor. First, there were the principal office holders who attended all council meetings: the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Treasurer and the Keeper of the Privy Seal.⁶⁵ Secondly, there were councillors who were professionally qualified to act as judges, such as the Lord Chief Justice, the Chief Baron of the Exchequer and the Solicitor-General.⁶⁶ Thirdly, there were the junior councillors, such as the Dean of the Chapel Royal, the King's Almoner, the Abbot of Westminster and the Dean of St Paul's. Thus Colet belonged to the third category.⁶⁷ He had no professional legal status and there is no record that he sat in Star Chamber.⁶⁸ Wolsey, however, had begun a process of reforming the King's Council after being appointed Lord Chancellor in 1515 and he duly monopolised it,⁶⁹ shifting the emphasis of its duties to judicial functions in Star Chamber, where he presided. Meetings were held almost every day in term from 1515 to 1517.⁷⁰ Between 1517 and 1520, Wolsey created three committees staffed by lesser councillors. These committees did not sit in the Star Chamber, but elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster.⁷¹ The members of the resultant committees included John Islip, Abbot of Westminster; Sir

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. W. H. Dunham, Jr, 'The Members of Henry VIII's Whole Council, 1509–1527', *ante*, lix (1944), 187–210; J. A. Guy, 'The Privy Council: Revolution or Evolution?', in C. Coleman and D. Starkey (eds), *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration* (Oxford, 1986), 59–85; Gleason, *John Colet*, 266.

65. Guy, 'Privy Council', 59–60.

66. Ibid., 60–2.

67. Ibid., 62–3.

68. Although the records for Star Chamber are patchy for this period: Guy, *Cardinal's Court*, 36–7.

69. Dunham, 'Council', 204, 187; Guy, 'Privy Council', 63.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 65.

Thomas Neville; Sir Andrew Windsor; Dr John Clerk; William Roper; and John Colet. The group was a mixture of clerics, peers and lawyers.⁷² Although the records of council proceedings for the time are fragmentary, they testify that Colet sat on these committees at least three times and probably many more.⁷³ In Dunham's list of individual members of the 'King's Whole Council' in attendance from 1509 to 1527, Colet is recorded as occasionally present from 25 June to 6 November 1518,⁷⁴ indicating that the dean's most intense involvement with Tudor politics was gained in 1518, the same year in which he re-attempted clerical reform at St Paul's by means of his *Exhibita*. Although the dean appears to have played a minor role in executing justice in the committees and on the full council, he was nevertheless part of Wolsey's plan to expand the hearing of litigation in order to appease public demand for justice.⁷⁵ Why this should have been the case is explained in a letter of 5 March 1518, in which Erasmus thanked Colet for his helpful negotiations with Henry VIII on his behalf, indicating Colet's royal influence at this time: 'I am grateful to you for kindly opening my business with the king, and I beg that you will put it through. For now I need a considerable sum for my journey'.⁷⁶

In a letter to Paolo Bombace in 1518, Erasmus included Colet, as a distinguished preacher, in a list of men who were influential with the king and formed the king's court, indicating the dean's high social profile as a preacher and influential courtier:

The men most influential with them [the king and queen] are those who excel in the humanities and in integrity and wisdom. Thomas Linacre is the physician ... Cuthbert Tunstall is his 'Master of the Rolls' ... Thomas More is of the Privy Council ... Pace, almost a brother to him, is secretary. William Mountjoy is head of her majesty's household. John Colet is a select preacher. I have mentioned only the leaders ... This is the kind of man of whom his palace is full, more like an academy than a king's court. What Athens or Stoa or Lyceum could one prefer to a court like that?⁷⁷

72. Ibid.

73. Gleason, *John Colet*, 247.

74. Dunham, 'Council', 208.

75. Guy, *Cardinal's Court*, 36.

76. D. Erasmus, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, i–viii, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson; annotated by P. G. Bietenholz, W. K. Ferguson and J. K. McConica (Toronto, 1974–88), v, letter no. 786; Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iii, 241: 'Habeo gratiam quod apud Regem negotium meum amanter agree coeperis, atque perficias rogo. Nam viatico amplum nunc opus est'.

77. Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vi, letter no. 855; Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iii, 355: 'Apud hos plurimum pollent qui bonis literis, qui integritate, qui prudential antebellum. Thomas Linacrus medicum agit ... Cuthbertus Tunstallus illi est a scriniis; Thomas Morus est a consiliis ... Paceus, huic pene germanus, ab epistolis Gulielmus Montioius Reginae famulatio praefectus est. Ioannes Coletus est a sacris concionibus. Praecipuos duntaxat recensui ... Huiusmodi viris ei differta est regia, verius μὲν οὖν quam aut: quas tu Athenas, quam Stoam aut quod Lyceum eiusmodi praetuleris aulae?'

Notwithstanding Colet's notoriety, however, his role within Wolsey's administration became a significant influence upon his own decanal career, resulting in his attempt to enlist Wolsey's help in the projected implementation of his perfectionist ideals. Colet's professed unhappiness with standards at St Paul's, as seen in his *Epitome* and *Exhibita*, was not simply motivated by his idealistic vision for ecclesiastical and sacramental hierarchy; he was also encouraged to act because of his recent contact with Wolsey's political world, which gave him the opportunity to engage powerful assistance in his attempted alteration of the cathedral statutes. However, Colet's political life coincided with another important development, which was responsible for his apparent urgency around 1518: illness.

By 1518, the dean's physical and mental strength had been in decline for several years.⁷⁸ As early as 1514, he had been preparing for, and looking forward to, retirement: 'I think daily of retiring and taking refuge among the Carthusians. My nest is nearly finished. When you return to us, as far as I can guess, you will find me there dead to worldly things.'⁷⁹ There is evidence that he was ill in 1517: in a letter addressed to Wolsey, dated 18 December 1517, he criticised physicians, of whom he had obviously had bitter experience: 'I trust you always keep as well as possible; and, to preserve your health the better, I trust you have but few dealings with doctors and their art. All they do is make great promises.'⁸⁰ Erasmus gave an account of Colet's attacks of illness in his biographical letter of 1521:

He said that he was preparing an abode for his old age ... But death forestalled him. For having been seized a few years before with the sweating sickness (a disease that is the special scourge of England), he was now for a third time attacked by it; and though he recovered from it to some degree, an internal disorder ensued from what the disease left behind it, of which he died. One physician pronounced him dropsical.⁸¹

The significance of this ill-health for Colet's ecclesiology was not only that his strength and enthusiasm for reform were limited, but also that

78. Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 527; Olin, Erasmus, 190.

79. Erasmus, *Collected Works*, ii, letter no. 314: 'Cotidie mediator meum secessum et latibulum apud Cartusienses. Nidus noster prope perfectus est. Reversus ad nos, quantum coniciere possum, illic mortuum mundo me reperies'. The 'nest' probably refers to Colet's lodgings, set aside for him at the Carthusian monastery at Sheen.

80. Lupton, *A Life*, 227; Latin in J. Colet, *Joannis Coleti Opuscula Quaedam Theologica: Letters to Radulphus on the Mosaic Account of Creation; On Christ's Mystical Body the Church; Exposition of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Chapters i-v) by John Colet, DD*, trans. J. H. Lupton (1876), 313: 'Cupio ut semper quam bellissime valeas; atque, quo melius tueare valetudinem tuam, opto ut cum medicis et cum medica arte parum commercii habeas: uam magna promittunt dumtaxat.'

81. Olin, Erasmus, 181; Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 520: 'Aiebat se parare sedem illam suae senectuti ... sed mors antevertit. Nam cum ante paucos annos correptus esset sudore pestilenti, qui morbus peculiariter infestat Britanniam, et ab eodem tertio repetitus, utcunque tamen revixit; sed ex mordi reliquiis contracta viscerum tabes, qua periit. Medicus unus hydropem esse iudicavit.'

his reform efforts were now restricted by lack of time due to impending infirmity, retirement or even death. His bouts of illness naturally reduced the number of opportunities for him to address Church issues openly. Therefore, the opportunity to gain powerful support from Henry VIII and Wolsey, via the political world, was the antidote to his administrative impotence at St Paul's, an impotence stretching back to 1506. Thus Colet would have been aware that his personal circumstances had conspired to ensure that 1518 would be the last year in which he had the opportunity to attempt clerical reform.⁸²

Colet's political involvement, combined with the fear of impending infirmity or death, was the spur to his final effort to implement his ecclesiological vision by means of attempted statute revision at St Paul's. Ultimately, however, he did not persuade Wolsey to support his prospective statutes. It is now time to examine both men's proposals in more detail.

Preparing a late nineteenth-century edition of the cathedral statutes, Simpson located various relevant records, predominantly manuscripts found at St Paul's, in Oxford and Cambridge libraries, and of the British Museum (now the British Library); he also used material printed in Dugdale.⁸³ Amongst the collection, Simpson reproduced statutes promulgated by Deans Baldock and Lisieux as well as Colet's *Epitome* and *Exhibita*.⁸⁴ In his *Epitome*, Colet attempted to distil the moral essence of the cathedral law and to add fresh life to the material. His additions reflected his ecclesiological concerns that moral standards should be upheld for the benefit of the entire body of Christ. Consequently, offenders were to be severely punished for the good of the whole.⁸⁵ Thus, just as ecclesiastical unity and perfection were the themes of Colet's other works, so they were in his *Epitome*. As in his other works, he wrote that the senior members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy – not least Colet himself – must enforce this strict code of behaviour.⁸⁶ Moreover, reflecting the structural pattern of his ecclesiological discourses, the *Epitome* builds up to an angry outburst against the depravity of dissolute clergy.⁸⁷ The *Epitome* is therefore typical of Colet's ecclesiological works. In his *Epitome*, Colet broadened the scope of his efforts, adding material to the pre-existing statutes regarding a wide range of cathedral staff. Although Simpson did not specifically identify Colet's contributions, they are clearly

82. 1518 was a particularly bad year for 'the Sweat': Gwyn, *King's Cardinal*, 58–9, 440.

83. *Registrum*, iv–xlix.

84. *Ibid.*, 1–177, *passim*, 3: 'Statutes and Customs of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, extracted from the Ancient Books and Muniments of the Cathedral by Deans Ralph de Baldock and Thomas Lisieux'.

85. *Ibid.*, 217–18.

86. J. Colet, *Joannes Coletus Super Opera Dionysii: Two Treatises on the Hierarchies of Dionysius*, by John Colet DD, trans. J. H. Lupton (1869), 42–55; *Registrum*, 221–5.

87. BL, Add. MS 63853, fos 81v–82r; *Hierarchies*, 126/Latin, 248; *Registrum*, 228–30.

distinguishable from the pre-existent statutes by means of a simple comparison with Baldock's and Lisieux's statutes.⁸⁸ Having isolated them, the dean's comments regarding virgers, vicars-choral, minor canons, the grammar master and the residentiary canons can now be discussed.

Colet's statements concerning the virgers⁸⁹ related to those laws dealing with idlers and traffickers in the church. The existing statutes decreed that if the traffickers ignored the threat of excommunication, then the virgers were to confiscate the merchandise on sale and throw it onto the pavement outside.⁹⁰ Colet also felt strongly about ejecting unsavoury elements from the cathedral. Not only did he leave this particular statute unchanged in his collection of extracts, but he also reiterated the sentiment, in a paraphrased form, in a section written with the virgers in mind: beggars, or those who interrupted people at prayer, were to be ejected.⁹¹ The virgers were ordered to 'search carefully all the lurking-places of the Cathedral Church, and if there should be anything lurking there which excites suspicion, to throw it out'.⁹² Moreover, according to the dean, they were to

drive outside the Cathedral notorious persons, especially common prostitutes, people carrying loads through the Cathedral, and beggars, who either lie in the Cathedral asleep in a disgusting manner or rudely importune people who are praying.⁹³

In elaborating upon the old statutes, Colet underlined his perfectionist ecclesiological concern that those who were not virtuous and pious should not be allowed to blight the pure and Mystical Body of Christ by their presence. His hierarchical ecclesiology is also evident in his declaration that the dean must 'correct the aberrations of everyone, and chastise with a just chastisement those who are stubborn'.⁹⁴ This phrase is reminiscent of his 1506 proposals for the government of the minor clergy, as is the order that the lower clergy should be judged by the chancellor; that regular Saturday morning disciplinary meetings should be held; and that the dean's permission was required for leave of

88. Between the *Epitome* and the pre-existing statutes: *ibid.*, 1–177, *passim*.

89. St Paul's was, and is, the only cathedral to use the spelling 'virger' rather than 'verger'.

90. *Ibid.*, 79.

91. *Registrum*, 224–5 compared with 72.

92. *Ibid.*, 224: 'Antequam vero claudant, scrutent omnes Ecclesiae latebras, et si quid sit, quod lateat suspiciosum, excutiat'; translation in Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 51.

93. *Registrum*, 224–5: 'Infames personas, maxime publicas meretrices, portatores onerum per Ecclesiam mendicos, qui vel foede et somniculose jacent in Ecclesia; vel importune interpellant orantes, extra Ecclesiae fores ejiciant et expellant'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 52.

94. *Registrum*, 225: '[Decanus] Excessus omnium corrigit, obstinatos justa animadversinone castigat'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 52.

absence.⁹⁵ Colet's strict ecclesiology of unity and perfection is manifest in another of his additions:

Those who are refractory and incorrigible are to be ejected from the choir, and their salary and emoluments taken from them; but all things are to be done with discernment, that each person may be treated for the improvement of his condition, to the edification rather than the destruction of the cathedral.⁹⁶

Hence, he was concerned with the whole cathedral body, not just the individual: once again a characteristic of his ecclesiology. Under the heading *De Virgiferis*, he wrote that

since the married state is oftentimes one full of business and disturbance, and since married men must needs attend to their wives, as mistresses, and our virgers, distracted by the anxieties of married life, neglect their duty in the Church, or else perforce abandon it (*since no man can well serve two masters*); therefore it is decreed ... that from henceforth none shall be in any wise virgers in St. Paul's, save such as pass their lives in celibacy without wives, and keep continent ... Moreover, let an unmarried man be preferred to this office before a widower, other things being equal; for it is fitting that those who approach so near to the altar of God, and are present at such great mysteries, should be wholly chaste and undefiled.⁹⁷

Colet believed that, in an ecclesiologically perfected world, carnal marriage could be abolished altogether, being replaced by a spiritual marriage between Christ and the Church.⁹⁸ The foregoing passage reflects Colet's ecclesiology concerning marriage, a subject that he readdressed with regard to another staff category: the vicars-choral.

Colet was concerned with the number, marital status and discipline of the vicars-choral.⁹⁹ After relating that, in former times, the vicars, or vicars-choral, had numbered thirty,¹⁰⁰ he lamented that the number,

95. *Registrum*, 222–5; Simpson, 'A Newly Discovered Manuscript', 145–74.

96. *Registrum*, 221: 'Pro gravioribus delictis, qui obstinati sunt et incorrigibiles, ejiciantur a Choro; stipendia et emolumenta eis detrahantur, sic omnia fiant discretione, ut quaeque persona pro sua conditione tractetur ad aedificationem Ecclesiae, non ad destructionem'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 52.

97. *Registrum*, 225: 'Praeterea, quia res uxorial est saepenumero res negotiosa & turbulent; atq[ue] mariti uxori, ut dominae suae oportet, studeant ... Virgiferi nostri, matrimoniali sollicitudine distracti, in Ecclesia officium suum negligent, aut necessitate coacti (quia duobus dominis nemo bene servire potest) deserant: Idcirco statutum est a domino Decano, Capitulo consentiente, & conclusum, ut deinceps in Ecclesia S. Pauli non sint ullo modo Virgiferi, nisi tales qui sine uxoriibus coelebes vitam ducant, & continentiam teneant ... qui uxorem habet, auditio uxoris nomine, statim repellatur. Item ad hoc officium, virgo vidua, si caetera sint paria, praeferatur: convenit enim, ut qui tam proprie accedunt ad Altare Dei, tam magnisq[ue] ministeriis intersunt, omnino casti & intemerati sint'; Lupton, *A Life*, 135.

98. J. Colet, *Opus De Sacramentis Ecclesiae: A Treatise on the Sacraments by John Colet*, trans. in Gleason, *John Colet*, 270–333, 277–9; Gleason, *John Colet*, 211.

99. *Registrum*, 234.

100. *Ibid.*, 67, 104.

and behaviour, of the company had changed for the worse. During his tenure, they totalled six, 'and those, too, either married, or capable of being so'.¹⁰¹ He was perhaps lamenting that, by the early sixteenth century, vicars-choral were more likely to be married professional musicians, rather than celibate priests, thus departing from his ideal, as set out in his treatise *De Sacramentis*.¹⁰² Directions of how vicars-choral were to be appointed follow. They shall

above all things, be such as desire to live well, to keep a good character, to show an example of honest dealing, in St. Paul's ... The vicars are not to be proctors, or attorneys, or executors of wills, or to undertake any other divine service.¹⁰³

This passage is indicative of Colet's ecclesiological emphasis upon the proper execution of one's duties and his strong dislike of legal involvement.¹⁰⁴ The idea is expressed in his 1518 statutes for the school, where he dictated that a master should not 'take office of sectorshipp (executorship) or proctorship, or any such besyness whiche shall let theyr dylygence and theyr necessary labour in the Scole'.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the minor canons came under scrutiny in Colet's *Epitome*:

Let not a minor canon frequent inns, wineshops, or ale-houses: let him not enter suspected houses; let him not converse with suspected persons; let him preserve his chastity; let him apply himself to his work with all integrity.¹⁰⁶

Another of Colet's ecclesiological additions to Baldock's and Lisieux's statutes was the stipulation of an additional requirement of the grammar master. In the pre-existent statutes, one section concerned the master of the singing school (*De Magistro Scholae Cantus*) and the master of grammar (*De Magistro Grammatices*); in both the pre-existing statutes and Colet's commentary, the cathedral's chancellor was to make the appointments.¹⁰⁷ However, in the pre-existing statutes, the required qualification for the grammar master was to be the degree of Master of

101. Ibid., 234: 'et hii quoque vel uxorati, vel tales qui uxores ducere possunt'; Lupton, *A Life*, 135. Perhaps suggesting that they were only in minor orders and thus able to marry.

102. Colet, *De Sacramentis*, 277–9; Gleason, *John Colet*, 211.

103. *Registrum*, 234: 'qui studeant in ecclesia S. Pauli bene vivere, bonos mores habere, exemplum honestatis ostendere ... Vicarii non sint Procuratores; non Attornati; non Testamentorum Executores; nec quodvis aliud officium suscipiant, quod eos a divino officio abstrahat & alienat'; Lupton, *A Life*, 136.

104. Cambridge University Library, ms Gg.iv.26, fo. 90r–v.

105. Lupton, *A Life*, 136.

106. *Registrum*, 235: 'Minor Canonicus non frequentet tabernas, nec vinales, nec cerviciales: suspectas domos non ingrediatur; cum suspectis personis non confabulentur; castitatem teneat; omni honestati studeat'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 54.

107. *Registrum*, 23 for the pre-existing statutes; 226 for Colet's words.

Arts, whereas in the dean's commentary of this statute, an exemplary moral character was also to be expected. The grammar master

should be an upright and honourable man, and of much and well-attested learning. Let him teach the boys, especially those belonging to the cathedral, grammar, and at the same time show them an example of good living. Let him take great heed that he cause no offence to their tender minds by any pollution of word or deed. Nay more, along with chaste literature, let him imbue them with holy morals, and to be to them a master, not of grammar only, but of virtue.¹⁰⁸

These words express not only Colet's ecclesiological ideals of holy morality and virtue, but also the principles upon which he founded his own school.¹⁰⁹

We have seen how the dean attempted to apply his ecclesiology to cathedral administration by means of his personal commentary on the cathedral statutes regarding virgers, vicars-choral, minor canons and the grammar master. However, the most extreme example of his ecclesiological passion, in the *Epitome*, is to be found in those passages concerning the residentiary canons. Colet begins by stating the ecclesiological ideal that canons should live 'in obedience, chastity, charity, prayer, fasting, reading, and contemplation'.¹¹⁰ Even so, his perfectionist hopes were apparently disappointed:

But alas! How grievous it is that as with everything well begun, so also this institution has gradually ... degenerated into an obviously calamitous condition: for the canons began to love the world more than God, and to follow the way of the world rather than the way of heaven ... retaining only the name and title of canon.¹¹¹

Soon, his disappointment turns to rage:

So deformed are they now in very respect. Both in life and in religion, that the Residentiaries themselves at length need reformation no less than the

108. Ibid., 226–7: 'Magister Scholae Grammaticae vir probus & honestus debet esse, atq[ue] multae & laudatae literaturae: Is pueros doceat Grammaticam, maxime eos qui sint Ecclesiae, eidem exemplum bonae vitae ostendat: Caveat magnopere ne scandalizat teneros animos aliqua seditate, vel facti vel sermonis; quinimo simul cum casta literature, imbuat eos sanctis moribus: sitq[ue] eis, non solum Grammaticae, sed etiam virtutis Magister. Is loco Cancellarii scribit in tabula, atq[ue] notat ordine, quid quisq[ue] legat in Ecclesia. Is etiam Magister, habitum geret in Choro, & in majoribus Festis primam lectionem legat'; Lupton, *A Life*, 136–7.

109. Perhaps indicating that the *Epitome* and the school statutes were composed at a similar time: BL, Add. MS 6274, fos 1r–11v. The manuscript is date 18 June 1518: fo. 1r.

110. *Registrum*, 228: 'in obedientia, castitate, charitate, oratione, jejunio, lectione, et contemplatione'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 53.

111. *Registrum*, 229: 'Sed pro dolor, ut omnia alia bene instituta, ita hoc quoque paulatim, successione temporum, in alium statum plane in foelicem devenit: nam Canonici coeperunt magis amare mundum quam Deum, et cursum seculi sequi quam coeli ... tenentes tantum nomen et titulum Canonici'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 53.

canons did in days gone by ... They cast aside their care for the Church; they pursue their own private gains; they convert the common property to their own private use. In these unhappy and disordered times *residence* in the Cathedral is nothing else than seeking one's own advantage, and, to speak more plainly, robbing the Church to enrich oneself.¹¹²

Colet's disappointment with the Church was nothing new. It was evident in his commentary on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius, written several years before:

Alas! Smoke and noisome blackness have now for a long while been exhaling upwards in such dense volume from the vale of benighted men, as well-nigh to overwhelm the light of that city [the Church]; so that now churchmen, shrouded in darkness, not knowing whither they go, have foolishly blinded and confounded themselves with all; so that in the world again there is nothing more confused than the mass of men.¹¹³

In this commentary, Colet asks Christ to restore 'order and tranquillity' to the Church, the ultimate ambition of his ecclesiology and, indeed, of his life. In his *Epitome*, he suggests the less celestial solution that the canons should reside perpetually in the cathedral precincts.¹¹⁴ Erasmus stated plainly that Colet was 'too strict about canonical discipline', no doubt leading to the canons' complaint that they were 'being treated as monks'.¹¹⁵ Thus, Colet's *Epitome* is evidence of his continuing, and unchanging, ecclesiological concern during his latter days as dean.

The *Epitome* cannot be described as an attempt at statute revision, nor did Colet intend his comments to be submitted as prospective alteration to the statutes. Rather, his outbursts, as in his other written works, seem to be a personal reflection upon his colleagues' deficiencies when compared with the ideals, in this case as set forth by Baldock and Lisieux. The *Epitome* is a lament for clerical standards, but hardly a serious proposal for the statute book. His *Exhibita*, however, are more measured and temperate proposals, to which we now turn.

112. *Registrum*, 229–30: 'Et in vita et in religione deformati, ut non minus quam quondam Canonici, jam Residentes ipsi, reformatione egeant: Deserant enim Ecclesias in quibus permanentiam professi sunt, vagantes solutius, et errant; divinum cultum reliquant; Curam Ecclesiae abjiciunt; propria lucra sectantur; communia bona in privitos usus vertunt: Nec aliud est in hac infoelicitate & confusione temporum in Ecclesia cathedrali residere, quam proprium commodum querere; ac ut planius loquar, spoliare Ecclesiam, & se ditiores facere; O scelus refandum! O detestanda iniquitas!'; Lupton, *A Life*, 134.

113. BL, Add. ms 63853, fos 81v–82r: 'Sed, pro dolor, fumus et caligo tetra ex valle hominum tenebrosorum tanta jam dudum et tam spissa spiravit sursum, ut civitatis lumen fere obruit; ut nunc ecclesiastici homines, involuti tenebris, ignorantes quo vadant, stulti commiscuerunt et confuderunt se cum omni, ut nunc rursus in mundo nihil sit, quam hominum turba, confusius'; Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology*, 20.

114. *Registrum*, 233.

115. Olin, Erasmus, 187; Allen and Allen, Erasmus, iv, 524: 'quod tenacior esset disciplinae regularis; ac subinde quiribatantur se pro monachis haberi'.

The *Exhibita* are about half the length of the *Epitome* and concern fewer areas of cathedral administration, relating only to the reformation of those with residentiary status at St Paul's, namely the canons.¹¹⁶ The *Exhibita* are less dramatic than the *Epitome*. However, Colet's ecclesiological themes are still manifest. He begins, naturally enough, by discussing his own authority, as set out in the ancient statutes.¹¹⁷ As in his *Epitome*, he states that, according to these records, the dean has authority over all canons, presbyters and vicars. He is able to correct the delinquent and justly to castigate the obstinately rebellious.¹¹⁸ Having thus established his own authority, Colet turned his attention to the residentiary canons, recommending that they reside permanently in the cathedral precincts, just as he had done in the *Epitome*.¹¹⁹ He moves on to consider the rules regarding the offices to be performed by the residentiary canons, including solemn festivals, choral duties and processions. He notes various other expectations, including one that the dean must undertake visitations. Colet's suggestions make up forty-seven short sections in total, in contrast to the thirty-three, much longer, sections of the *Epitome*.¹²⁰

As Colet specifically designed the *Exhibita* to be read by Wolsey, the most significant comparisons to be made are not with his *Epitome*, nor with previous St Paul's statutes, but with Wolsey's subsequent statutes.¹²¹ Such a comparison will reveal how much Wolsey relied upon Colet's proposals, what the two men were attempting to achieve by their different proposals, how they differed in their expression and how successful they were. The text of Wolsey's statutes appears in Simpson's nineteenth-century compilation of the cathedral statutes.¹²² Two short passages in Wolsey's text demonstrate his knowledge of Colet's work: Wolsey's second paragraph contains the phrase 'Nam cum quatuor untaxat praeter Decanum sint Residentes, valde curandum est.'¹²³ The same passage appears in the fourth paragraph of the *Exhibita*, entitled

116. *Registrum*, 237: 'pro Reformatione Status Residenciariorum in Ecclesia Sancti Pauli'.

117. *Ibid.*: 'De Decano et ejus Autoritate, ex antiquo Registro Ecclesiae'.

118. *Ibid.*: 'Secundum antiqua Ecclesiae Statuta Sancti Pauli, Decanus omnibus Canonicis, Presbyteris, Vicariis ... autoritate et potestate ordinaria et immediate. Is regimen habet animarum. Huic est jurisdictio et correctio delinquentiam quorumcunque in Ecclesia, et obstinatorum ac rebellium justa castigatio.'

119. *Ibid.*, 238: from 'De Residentia Decani' and 'De Loco-tenente Decani' to 'Residentia solum in Ecclesia S. Pauli'.

120. *Ibid.*, 239: 'De Officio Residenciariorum in Divino Cultu', 'Quid Residentes in choro' and 'Ceremoniae in Choro'; 247: 'Visitatio Decani'. The entire *Exhibita* occupies *ibid.*, 237–48; *Epitome*, 217–36.

121. Colet's *Exhibita* are headed thus: 'Exhibita a Johanne Collet Decano, reverendissimo Patri et Domino Cardinali Eboracensi ac Apostolico Legato a latere [Wolsey], pro Reformatione Status Residenciariorum in Ecclesia Sancti Pauli, primo Septembris, Anno Domini 1518': *Registrum*, 237.

122. *Ibid.*, 249: 'Statuta Decani et Capituli Ecclesiae Cathedralis Sancti Pauli London. Fact per Dominum Thomam, Cardinalem Eboracensem Archiepiscopum, et Regni Angliae Cancellarium ex consensu Decani et Capituli, per decretum sine Arbitramentum'; full statutes, 249–63. Simpson's source for the *Exhibita* is now lost.

123. Entitled: 'De Exoneratione Ecclesiae ab aere alieno, et dignitoribus ad futuram Residentiam praefendis, cum provisione pro Residentia Decani, et de numero Residentium'; *Registrum*, 251.

'De aliis quatuor Residentibus'.¹²⁴ Likewise, the fifth paragraph of Wolsey's statutes contains the phrase 'ab aedibus aut domibus suis ad Ecclesiam accedat, non vanitate, non pompose, sed religiose et graviter, sicut decet professores Canonicae Vitae, studentes placere magis Deo humilitate'.¹²⁵ This sentence is almost identical to a phrase found in the seventh chapter of the *Exhibita*, entitled 'Quid Residentes in Choro'.¹²⁶ Having demonstrated that Wolsey was aware of Colet's *Exhibita* and indebted to it in a minor way, I shall now outline the predominant differences between Colet's and Wolsey's work.

Contrary to Victorian ideas, which proclaimed that Wolsey's statutes were 'framed ... on the lines of Colet's presentments',¹²⁷ Wolsey's work is almost entirely different to the *Exhibita*. For instance, Wolsey's statutes vary in scope, relating only to the residentiary canons; they are also shorter, being made up of thirteen long sections, rather than the forty-seven short sections of the *Exhibita*.¹²⁸ Early on in Wolsey's text, Colet is mentioned by name as being a beloved brother.¹²⁹ However, this reference betrays no significant reliance by Wolsey upon the *Exhibita*. Indeed, the dean is mentioned only in passing, along with four other residentiary canons: William Harrington, John Smyth, John Downam and Thomas Sewell.¹³⁰ In fact, far from using the *Exhibita* as a basis for his statute revisions, Wolsey found Warham's 1502 statutes a more useful reference point,¹³¹ mentioning Warham's 'ordinationes' six times in his text.¹³² These citations demonstrate that although Wolsey may have been prompted to attempt statute reform by the *Exhibita*, he was not attempting to paraphrase Colet's work; he was concerned with his own interpretation of the existing statutes.

Historians have been silent on the question of why Wolsey became involved in St Paul's Cathedral statute-making. I conjecture two reasons: first, because of his receipt of Colet's *Exhibita*; and secondly, because 1518 was a year of intense reform activity for Wolsey, as Lord Chancellor,

124. Ibid., 238; Colet wrote: 'Nam quum quatuor untaxat sint ut hii boni viri et sapientes sint.'

125. Ibid., 239.

126. Ibid.: 'Accedant Residentes ad Ecclesiam, non vaniter et pompaticae, sed religiose et graviter, sicut decet professores Canonicae vitae magis studentes placere Deo in humilitate, quam in superbia seculo se ostentare.'

127. Lupton, *A Life*, 132, n. 2; Carpenter, 'Reformation 1485-1660', 112. 'Presentments' is a curious choice of word, given that documents submitted in visitations were called 'bills of presentment' or just 'presentments' for short. Such documents contained answers to the visitation articles or generally drew attention to faults needing remedy. There is, however, no record that Colet made a visitation around this time.

128. *Registrum*, 237-48, compared with 249-63.

129. Ibid., 249.

130. Ibid.: 'Cum itaque orta alias inter dilectos filios Johannem Collet, nunc Decanum dictae Ecclesiae Cathedralis Divi Pauli London ex parte una, et Willielmum Harrington, Johannem Smyth, Johannem Downam et Thomama Sewell quatuor Canonicos Residentarios ejusdem Ecclesiae dudum novellas, novellas.'

131. Ibid., 206: 'Statuta Domini Willielmi Warham Episcopi London facta cum consensu Decani et Capituli'. Warham was consecrated Bishop of London on 5 Oct. 1502 and translated to Canterbury on 29 Nov. 1502. The statutes occupy *ibid.*, 206-14.

132. Ibid., 251, 252, 253 (twice), 260, 262.

papal legate *a latere*, Archbishop of York and King's Councillor.¹³³ Thus he would have been receptive to the idea of meddling in statute reform at St Paul's – an idea prompted by Colet's request.

Another significant difference between Wolsey's work and the *Exhibita* is Wolsey's emphasis upon money, compared with Colet's near lack of interest in the matter. Wolsey concerned himself with fourteen separate financial issues in his text, often mentioning specific sums of money either to be paid or received.¹³⁴ Wolsey's pragmatic nature is apparent in these specific decrees concerning Church finances. Colet was largely concerned with the moral ideals of the Church, wherein he believed lay its strength. Hence, his insistence upon Saturday disciplinary hearings, a proposal absent from Wolsey's statutes.¹³⁵ Wolsey, on the other hand, was concerned with the durability of the Church's administrative efficiency. These divergent texts, therefore, portray two very different ecclesiastical ordinaries.

Thus, the *Epitome*, including its occasional commentary upon selected pre-existent statutes of Baldock and Lisieux, was an ecclesiological statement about the standards of clerical behaviour at St Paul's that Colet wished to see during his tenure as dean. His additions are so idiosyncratic that they cannot be considered to have been serious proposals for statute reform. What exactly Colet's purpose was in composing them, therefore, is open to conjecture. I suggest that they were a personal, and private, expression of disappointment, perhaps written in preparation for a more considered set of proposals to be structured as *Exhibita*. His *Exhibita* are framed in a more moderate fashion, without the outbursts of the *Epitome*. Therefore, it is more plausible that these latter proposals were meant for consideration by the cathedral body. However, Wolsey chose not to endorse the *Exhibita*,¹³⁶ deciding instead, as an experienced ecclesiastical administrator, to compose his own quite different statutes.

Colet's ecclesiology was the personal context, and motivation, for the composition of his *Epitome* and *Exhibita*. In these texts, he emphasised the need for perfection in the Church in accordance with the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy: every cleric's diligent execution of the duties entrusted to him was essential for Church unity; a humble knowledge of one's role and one's position in the clerical ranks was required in order to achieve a unified body capable of ascending the ladder of perfection from humankind to God. The dean's idealism did not necessarily point to any moral failings on the part of the canons, as flagrant breaches of

133. Gleason, *John Colet*, 240–4.

134. For example, *Registrum*, 250: '880 libras inter eosdemnovellos Stagiarios'; other references are on 251, 253, 254, 262.

135. *Registrum*, 241: 'De Capitulis Sabbatalibus: Omni Sabbato, vel Decanus, vel eo absente, unus Residens, audiat defectus Chori in ea ebdomado, et delinquentes examinet, et errata corrigat'. Colet's *Exhibita* give much more emphasis to the choir than Wolsey's statutes.

136. *Ibid.*, 418–19.

clerical discipline by residentiaries were rare.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, he devoted much of his clerical life to promoting the idea of a perfected Church. The *Epitome* and the *Exhibita* represent Colet's last reform efforts. Accounts of his increasing illness, through 1518 and 1519, inhibited any further attempts to change the cathedral statutes in his final year.

At the end of his life, Colet was Wolsey's ally and the king's friend, as well as a respected humanist: in 1519, Erasmus wrote to several prominent humanists, including Richard Pace, Thomas Lupset, Lord Mountjoy and John Fisher, expressing his grief at Colet's death.¹³⁸ The tone of Erasmus's letters suggests that he expected, perhaps even demanded, that his correspondents should also mourn. However, Erasmus seems to have been mourning the loss of a close personal friend, rather than a great Church reformer. Colet's reform attempts had consistently failed throughout his career as dean – and his attempted statute modifications of 1518 were no exception. During the last few years of his life, he found the St Paul's clergy shameful, and had attempted to tell them so. Colet's ecclesiological and political activities between 1515 and 1518, combined with increasing illness, resulted in his final attempt to engage with the Church on a practical, rather than a theoretical, level. Like his earlier attempts at reform, they failed, not fundamentally because his ideals were radical, but because his *Epitome* was probably never aired publicly, and because his *Exhibita* were seemingly unacceptable to Wolsey.

Colet's attack on clerical behaviour, whether in 1506 or in 1518, exposed his weakness: spiritual pride. He genuinely believed himself to be superior to others in the spiritual life. He lacked, however, the spirit of encouragement and the ability to see good in others. Most of all, his ecclesiology blinded him to what could be realistically expected of the clergy. Requiring the canons to be continuously resident, for instance, could only result in his disappointment. From Oxford scholar to London dean, Colet's ecclesiology never wavered from the unrealistically idealistic. It was this perfectionism that led him to ask the impossible and ignore the meritorious. Thus, at the end of 1518, it was St Paul's School for which Colet could justly be proud. As for statute reform, his ideals for the Church remained an unrealised vision of perfection.

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137. D. Lepine, *A Brotherhood of Canons Serving God: English Secular Cathedrals in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1995), 155.

138. Erasmus, *Complete Works*, letter no. 1023, dated 15 Oct. 1519, was addressed to Guillaume Budé; letters nos 1025, 1026, 1027, 1028, dated 16 Oct. 1519, were addressed to Richard Pace, Thomas Lupset, William Dancaster and William Blount (Lord Mountjoy), respectively. Letter no. 1030, dated 17 Oct. 1519, was written to Bishop John Fisher. All these letters express profound loss at Colet's demise.