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The Influence of Dionysius the Areopagite on John Colet

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THE INFLUENCE OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE
ON JOHN COLET

by
Daniel T. Lochman

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations refer to Colet's works collected in J. H. Lupton's four-volume English and Latin edition (London: Bell, 1867-1875), and reflect popular, rather than consistent, titles for the works. Each abbreviation is followed by a Roman numeral indicating the volume in which the text appears. All references to Colet, both in the text and in the notes, follow this edition and, whenever useful, I have included Latin versions of Lupton's translation in the notes, signified simply by "Lupton" and the appropriate page number.

Christ's Mystical Body, the Church = MB, IV
Colet's Celestial Hierarchy = CCH, III
Colet's Ecclesiastical Hierarchy = CEH, III
De Sacramentis Ecclesiae = SE, III
Lectures on I Corinthians = EC, II
Lectures on Romans = EnR, I
Exposition of Romans (Edmund's Romans) = ExR, IV
Letters to Radulphus = LR, IV

Other minor works will be referred to in the text, without abbreviations.
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Friend of Erasmus and Thomas More, advocate of internal Church reform, anti-scholastic, humanist, Renaissance educator: such diverse and sometimes misleading titles have long been a part of scholarship concerning John Colet. Biographical information about the Dean of St. Paul's is scarce, and his principal works had remained unpublished until the 19th century. As a result, critics have often speculated about the Dean's activities and ideas with only second-hand biographical testimonies by Erasmus and More and scanty textual support.

Because he lived during those years falling precisely between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Colet has been alternately tied to scholasticism and Christian humanism. Neither of these labels, however, fully comprehends the variety of intellectual traditions upon which Colet draws. The confusion which results from the use of these labels is compounded by those who would associate the rise of the English Renaissance with the onset of the English Reformation. Colet died fourteen years before Henry VIII officially broke with the Church of Rome, but many studies have nevertheless implied that the Dean was a precursor, both in spirit and thought, of the force which transformed England's religious beliefs. His attitudes toward contemporary clergy, his advocacy of internal Church reform, his apparent indifference to Aquinas and scholastic theology have all conspired, in the minds of
some scholars, to create a picture of Colet as a prototypical English reformer—an Anglican before the rise of Anglicanism.

This practice of labelling Colet has all too often resulted in the mixing of presuppositions and anachronisms with critical analysis. Given the proper critical perspective, Colet can appear in as many guises, fit as many labels, as scholars seriously present. Although such assumptions provide interesting insights into the biases of Colet's critics, they have little to do with the reality of Colet's thought.

One important instance of misdirected scholarly efforts concerns Colet's notion of "reform" itself. For 19th century critics, Colet's frequent calls for reform within the Church provided ample evidence of the Dean's latent Anglicanism; they assumed that, by reform, Colet referred to the same inclination to doctrinal change which they themselves understood. Colet's Lectures on Romans and Convocation Sermon, however, point out a quite different sense of "reform" based on the Platonic distinction between form and matter. According to Colet, men outside of Christian belief have no form by which their material bodies can be placed in alignment with God's divine goodness. Through their belief and acts of charity within the Church, men gain a spiritual form which completes, in a Platonic fashion, the imperfect being of mere matter.¹ Those who have become formed through the Church, but have since fallen away from that complete spiritual being, must be re-formed by again placing themselves in union with the
Church. Men are thus to be reformed by reuniting themselves with the Church, not by developing new doctrinal requirements.

In this century, a handful of scholars has begun to construct a more systematic view of Colet's ideas. Such a view requires an abandonment of both presupposition and anachronism; it entails a close, integrative analysis of the texts and their sources. The problem inherent in comprehensive studies of Colet, however, is that his works are not systematic; his use of terminology is often loose and occasionally contradictory, and his stylistic method of digressing from textual analysis presents his unique ideas in bits and pieces.

Nevertheless, the works demonstrate a striking consistency in conception and purpose. Colet's chief preoccupations concern right human action in this world and the transcendence of the material world through union with the divine and heavenly. In addition, Colet's theology focuses upon human salvation—the soteriology by which the divine world is achieved. Although his soteriology is based upon the Platonic division of earthly and heavenly spheres, like Renaissance Neo-Platonism in Italy, it is important to note that this same soteriological perspective can be found in scholastic philosophy; Colet's dependence on Platonism does not in itself indicate Colet's anti-scholasticism.

The sources of Colet's Platonism, or more correctly,
his Neo-Platonism, are diverse. Origen, Augustine, Jerome, Ignatius, Chrysostom, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, as well as Plotinus and Plato, are all woven together in Colet's works. But foremost among his Neo-Platonic sources is the Pseudo-Dionysius, or Dionysius the Areopagite; besides the treatises on Dionysius' celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, Colet directly refers to this little known patristic figure in De Sacramentis Ecclesiae and the commentary on I Corinthians and indirectly alludes to his theological system in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Romans commentaries and the Letters to Radulphus.

The reasons for Colet's interest in the Pseudo-Dionysian writings are unclear, but there is little doubt that the future Dean of St. Paul's, at least in his commentaries on the hierarchies and the sacraments, believed Dionysius to have been the genuine disciple of Paul—the true convert at Mars' hill mentioned in Acts 17: 22-34. Apparently, Colet ignored or had not yet heard Grocyn's conclusion that the Dionysian writings could not be contemporaneous with Paul, or Lorenzo Valla's similar decision, published by Erasmus in 1504.

While the identity of the true author of the Dionysian corpus and the reason why he identified himself as Dionysius the Areopagite pose interesting questions, such questions are peripheral to my purpose here. Either Colet was ignorant of his contemporaries' suspicions regarding Dionysius, or he simply chose to disregard them; in either case, he fully
accepted the Areopagite's authenticity. Since this study will treat the manner in which Colet responds to Dionysius, I intend to share the Dean's opinion in this matter. Even though Colet's estimate of Dionysius may have undergone drastic revision after Grocyn's lectures, there is no substantive information to suggest such a change; it is quite possible that Colet would have appreciated the Dionysian writings regardless of their proximity to primitive Christianity.

The fact that Colet accepted the Pseudo-Dionysian writings as genuine should not, in itself, cast a shadow over his scholarly abilities. Rather, he followed a long list of medieval and Renaissance scholars—including Scotus Eriugena, Richard and Hugh of St. Victor, Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, Grosseteste, Ruysbroeck, Ficino and Pico—all of whom were influenced by Dionysius' supposedly authentic writings. Significantly, the question of Dionysian authenticity was not finally laid to rest until the end of the 19th century. In part, the difficulty of determining the Dionysian corpus' spurious nature stems from the late 5th or early 6th-century author's intentional use of scriptural references in passages otherwise dependent on non-Christian, Platonic sources as well as his adherence to a pseudo-epigraphic tradition common in early Christian literature. Given the intentionally contrived character of the Dionysian writings, Colet's acceptance of them is hardly surprising.

The modern reader may be puzzled to find the apparently
staid and austere founder of St. Paul's dabbling in such an esoteric, mystical brand of theology as that of the Pseudo-Dionysius. But, from a Renaissance point of view, Dionysius' theology was less esoteric, less removed from the common run of things, than the 20th century reader might suspect. His importance in philosophy and theology from Eriugena to Aquinas suggests that if "Dionysius Areopagitica" was not a household name, it would at least have been current in major universities. In fact, the Dionysian writings enjoyed something of a revival in the later 14th century through the circulation of the anonymous Cloud of Unknowing, Nicholas of Cusa's Vision of God, and the works of Ficino and Pico—a revival not dampened until Valla's suspicions about Dionysius appeared in 1504.

Further, the sense in which the Dionysian writings are to be considered mystical is a limited one. Although the terms "mystic" and "mystical" were current in English as early as the mid-14th century, they signified, in part, the ineffable transcendence from the human to divine spheres through religious symbols. The mystical body of Christ, for instance, "mystically" comprehends the union of mundane symbol with the divine head of the Church, Christ. Not until the 18th century did the derivative "mysticism," as an "-ism," appear in the English language, and only in the latter half of the 19th century did mysticism become associated with the "negative way"—the individual's progression through various psychological stages leading to a total abandonment of the
self. In the 20th century, mysticism still denotes this psychological progression, and, in a wider sense, has come to include any occult or quasi-religious state of mind. The sense of "mystic" with which Colet was most familiar, that of the representation of the ineffable through symbolic metaphor and allegory, has been almost wholly lost.

For Colet, then, the study of Dionysius the Areopagite meant neither a radical abandonment of medieval subjects of study nor the acceptance of mysticism in its modern psychological and occult senses. Instead, Colet, intrigued by several points in the Dionysian world-view, employs parts of that system in a larger syncretic mesh composed of Paul, Augustine, Origen, Aquinas, Ficino and Pico, in addition to the Pseudo-Dionysius. Within this mesh, the Areopagite supplies a Neo-platonic conception of a unified, homogeneous and orderly universe that is joined to a Pauline and scholastic emphasis on Christian morality. To be sure, Colet's works present no systematic theology and exhibit no explicit attempt to unite these central elements. These elements are, however, subtly interwoven throughout his works, and they culminate in a unique, personal understanding of Christian action in the human order. Right Christian action constitutes Colet's focal subject while Neoplatonic metaphysics forms the background which fills out and lends credence to that subject.

Salvation is the goal toward which Christian action should be directed, and Colet's general purpose is soterio-
logical. In fact, Christian salvific transcendence lies at the heart of his rapprochement of the divine and human orders. In addition to providing significant components for Colet's metaphysics, the Pseudo-Dionysius generates a principle of salvific transcendence appropriated, in part, by Colet. These metaphysical and soteriological aspects of Dionysian influence will be treated more fully in the remainder of this study, but it is useful at this point to understand the general trends in Colet's use of the Dionysian works. Certainly, the Dionysian influence is central to Colet's overall world-view.

Considering its importance, surprisingly little has been published regarding the influence of Dionysius on Colet. Although many studies mention the Pseudo-Dionysius in passing, few take more than a cursory glance at his writings. All too often, when studies do treat Dionysius, they overlook the general metaphysical and soteriological implications of Dionysian theology, focussing instead upon, as Frederic Seebohm puts it, the "wildness of speculation" in the Dionysian works.

The 19th century's automatic identification of the Pseudo-Dionysius with "mysticism" in a psychological sense, as well as its progress in determining the spurious nature of the Dionysian writings, led Seebohm, the great Victorian defender of Colet, to a negatively biased view of Dionysius: "Underneath . . . the wild excess of symbolism and speculation which . . . formed, as it were, the froth of the
Dionysian theology, Colet seems to have found . . . that religion is a thing of the heart. . . ."11 Such an introduction is hardly likely to inspire an objective analysis of Colet's Dionysian influence, and later studies, such as those by J. H. Lupton and Donald Parsons,12 although more moderate in tone, still exhibit traces of this underlying bias.

Several recent studies have assumed a more positive attitude towards the Pseudo-Dionysius and his influence on Colet, but even these have failed to penetrate the veil of anachronisms surrounding Dionysius. E. W. Hunt's admirable contribution to the study of Colet's thought, Dean Colet and His Theology, although the first to dispel many labels attributed to Colet, nevertheless sees the Dionysian influence in terms of the 19th century's view of "mysticism."13 While Hunt abandons the earlier bias towards the Dionysian writings, he retains a conviction that Dionysius' mysticism is principally devoted to the psychological progression from the imperfectly human to divinely perfect mystical experience. Because of his dependence upon Dionysius, Colet too is claimed as a mystic, and Hunt quotes W. R. Inge for support: "No writer had more influence upon the growth of Mysticism in the Church than Dionysius the Areopagite, whose main object is to present Christianity in the light of a Platonic mysteriosophy." This "Platonic mysteriosophy" is, in turn, nothing more than the "mystic" or "negative" way of psychological transcendence—a way lacking the 15th century's rich
understanding of the mystical as symbolic representation for the ineffable. In short, by accepting the Pseudo-Dionysius (and through him, Colet) as an exponent of mysticism, Hunt anachronistically reads a 19th century view into a theology by no means dependent only upon personal transcendence.¹⁴

Leland Miles, in his *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition*, also argues that Colet is a genuine mystic. Like Hunt, Miles develops the notion of psychological mysticism, leading from the purifying to perfecting levels of mystical experience. Unlike Hunt, however, Miles relates one Dionysian symbol, the metaphor of God as light, to the early Christian notion of emanation—the gradual decrease in the purity of the divine as it reaches the further limits of the universe. Specifically, he contrasts the symbol of the sun in Dionysius' generic sense of the Godhead with Colet's application of the symbol to Christ in particular.¹⁵ This contrast is, in turn, a part of a larger contrast between Dionysius' and Colet's redemptive schemes; Colet's Christological redemptive scheme, as Miles points out, is in clear contrast with earlier Neoplatonist schemes, including Ficino's. But despite the importance of Miles' general organization of Colet's many sources and his development of Colet's dependence upon the Dionysian symbol of light, he fails to notice many other contrasting symbols of equal significance. In short, Miles' brevity concerning Colet's adaptation of Dionysian symbolism is as apt to mislead, in terms of Dionysius' general influence
upon Colet, as it is to inform.

R. Peters, in "John Colet's Knowledge and Use of Patristics," also treats a wide range of sources in Colet, including the Pseudo-Dionysius. Peters' special concentration concerns Colet's methods of exegesis, but, in addition, the article provides valuable spadework in culling Dionysian influences in Colet's De Sacramentis Ecclesiae. Unfortunately, Peters does not extend his study beyond this work, and he thus fails to give an adequate overall view of the Dionysian influence.

This study will trace the general Dionysian influence as well as those passages obviously derived from the Pseudo-Areopagite. By including references to Colet's scriptural commentaries as well as the so-called Dionysian treatises (the Hierarchies and De Sacramentis), a more balanced appraisal of Colet's "use" of Dionysius can be attained. Further, by approaching Colet with no fixed historical or theological labels, I hope to avoid much of the confusion which has traditionally surrounded both the Pseudo-Dionysius and Colet.

The works of the Pseudo-Dionysius and Colet demonstrate a marked division between what Arthur O. Lovejoy has called "otherworldliness" and "this-worldliness": between the willful desire for a source of stability, permanence, coherence and unity, on the one hand, and the willful rejection of mutability, chaos, and the multiplicity of the mundane world on the other. In their absolute forms, otherworld-
liness is an unattainable participation in divinity which Christian men nevertheless strive to attain, and this-worldliness is an unavoidable participation in the fragmented material order which Christians nevertheless strive to avoid. Dionysius' emphasis on a Neoplatonic conception of the Godhead and his hierarchic metaphysics clearly sets up a stable and orderly ontic structure in opposition to the imperfect variability of the human condition; in Colet, the contrasts between that other, heavenly world, and this world are even more clear.

At the topmost level of Dionysius' hierarchic universe is, of course, the divine Godhead. In a very real sense, his concept of the Godhead is dependent upon the Platonic idea of the Good, the transcendent actualization of all being in a single, unified supra-Being. As C. E. Rolt has noted, the central Dionysian term for the divine emphasizes this fundamental superiority of transcendent over material being: \( \Upsilon \varepsilon \rho \rho \omicron \upsilon \varsigma \zeta \Theta \epsilon \alpha \rho \chi \varsigma \alpha \), the super-essential Godhead, is necessarily distinguished from all that has essence or being (\( \pi \omicron \omicron \varsigma \omicron \omicron \omicron \) ) in that it is itself the totality of all beings. Although the Godhead is essentially different from mere being, however, all beings are dependent upon this Godhead for their origin and continuation as beings—the Godhead is the completion and perfection of all being in itself. In effect, the Godhead, because of its supremacy to and necessity for all beings, is far more than the sum of all its creations.
For Dionysius, man, as a mere being, can only speak of the Godhead in symbols. Because a man can only be a being, can only exist as a particular element in a universe filled with multiplicity, anything he says about the divine world must be limited by the multiplicity of this world; as a part of the universe, man can only partially approximate the Godhead through human languages. According to a characteristic Dionysian paradox, the Godhead is at once nameless, since it is beyond all names, and named by all things in that all beings, if they have a real existence, must equally represent the Godhead which created them. Thus, all scriptural terms for God, from abstract words like "Life" and "Truth" (John 14:6) to concrete representations such as "Dew" (Hosea 14:5) and "Rock" (Ps 31:2-3), equally indicate divine qualities in an imperfect manner.²⁰

In the Divine Names, Dionysius applies the term "Godhead" to the entirety of the Christian Trinity and distinguishes certain names applicable to the Godhead as a whole (e.g., "Super-Excellent," "Good," "Fair") and others applicable only to the Trinity's persons (e.g., "Father," "Son," "Spirit"). Dionysius explains in this treatise many of the names (including Goodness, Light, Beauty, Jealousy, Life, Perfection and Unity) applied to God in the revealed scriptures. But while a full analysis of the Dionysian interpretations of divine attributes—interpretations indicative not only of Dionysius' understanding of symbols, but also of his attitudes towards contemporary doctrines and clergy—would
be itself interesting, it is more necessary that I treat the Areopagite's influence on Colet's idea of God.

An obvious point of contrast between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Colet lies in the latter's less frequent reference to the Godhead and the composite Trinity. The reader of Colet is more likely to discover references to the Trinity's differentiated persons than the reader of Dionysius. Further, when Colet does mention the Godhead, as such, it is generally in conjunction with his chief intermediary between the divine and human worlds—Christ. In a passage which fuses Dionysius' sense of God with a Pauline emphasis on the redemptive role of Christ, Colet states that from the Son of God a divine influence proceeds throughout creation "by the diffusion of a savour of Godhead through the mass of the elect; aye, and [it] will proceed without interruption in its marvellous course; till all that shall be saved have a savour of the Godhead" (EC, p. 58). Thus, although Colet does occasionally refer to the Godhead, such references tend to illustrate the more immediate power of the divine among men through Christ; in contrast to Dionysius, Colet seldom speculates about the Godhead's nature as an end in itself.

A second significant deviation of Colet from Dionysius concerns the relationship of the Godhead—Goodness itself—to evil. As Rolt aptly puts it, Dionysius demonstrates "at wearisome length" that evil in itself can have no real existence. The Areopagite concludes, after an analysis of all levels of beings from angels to devils, men and inanimate
matter, that evil is the rejection of God's divine emanations rather than a potent force, independent and calculating, which consciously wages war on the Good. By turning away from the positive effects of the Good, evil loses its place in the existent order of things: "Hence evil is Non-Existent." Thus, although evil is tolerated by the Good, it is clearly distinct from the Good, just as a disease is tolerated by, but distinct from, the life of a body.

The source of evil is a more complex problem for Dionysius since, as Non-Existent, evil cannot come from a Godhead productive only of existent, positive things. Even devils, in that they were or are, in some measure, created beings, must have some kinship with the Good, if, in fact, they were or are existent at all. Only insofar as they turn away from the Good do devils lose their real existence; thus, "if they are not always evil, then they are not evil by their natural constitution, but only through a lack of angelic virtues," and they cannot be constant. Since evil cannot inhere in any thing, Dionysius concludes that evil must result from many weaknesses rather than a single force; if evil were to possess a unitive purpose, it would become a thing outside of the Good's real existence, but this is impossible, Dionysius asserts, since we can truly speak of evil's presence. Thus, evil can only be a privative existence derived from many partial weaknesses.

In his description of the nature and origin of evil, Dionysius clearly argues against Manichean dualism; he
carefully distinguishes good from evil while insisting that evil is neither a real, consistent force nor totally divorced from the Good. This deductively-based argument, derived as it is from fine semantic shadings, has a certain fatuousness which critics have been unable to explain away. Nevertheless, Dionysius' theory of evil had a strong influence on Augustine and Aquinas, and even Colet, in a passage noted by Miles, seems to have accepted some of the positivism of Dionysian Goodness.

But in the supplement appended to his treatise on the Celestial Hierarchy, Colet leaves no doubt that evil is a concerted, calculating, universal force. In describing the fallen members of the angelic hierarchy, the devils, he states:

But, evil themselves, they use all for what is evil; plotting before everything the everlasting destruction of mankind. Enduring not, in their envy, the glory which men are to have in Christ, they suggest evil under the guise of good. . . At times they harm men's bodies, and shatter their limbs, and bring on them diseases. . . (CCH, pp. 46-47).

Here, certainly, no effort is made to demonstrate the dependence of evil upon the Good. Instead, Colet portrays evil as an entirely separate power, dominated by Satan and supported by nine orders of devils, each with the professedly militant purpose of destroying the Good. Although Colet would never allow for the possibility of evil conquering the Good, he does attribute a much greater power to the forces of evil—"forces" in a militaristic sense—than does the supposed disciple of Paul.
Colet's concept of the Godhead is thus less likely to comprehend evil than is that of Dionysius; Colet strongly emphasizes the nearly-Manichean antithesis of good and evil, in contrast to Dionysius' constant efforts to create a synthesis between the two. Even Dionysius' assertion that evil begins in weakness seems mild when compared with Colet's view that evil expresses a true animosity for the Good.

In his emphasis upon the individuated persons of the Trinity and in his understanding of the nature of evil, Colet, as I have said, clearly deviates from Dionysian theology. Although Colet occasionally dabbles in metaphysical descriptions of the Godhead, his real debt to Dionysius is of another kind.

The source of Dionysian influence concerning the Godhead lies in the many symbols which Colet appropriates from the Divine Names and the Hierarchies. Dionysius constructs a science of symbolism, as it were, in which representations for the Godhead can, as I have earlier noted, be classified as generic or personal, abstract or concrete. This latter distinction is refined in Dionysius' Celestial Hierarchy; although the Godhead can only truly be represented by negation, it is better when using positive symbols to construct an image clearly divorced from the reality the image tries to represent, lest, as Colet translates it, "the duller sort, attracted by the fairer objects, should think God to be that very thing which he is called" (CCH, p. 13). Thus, concrete images—birds, animals, plants, stones and elements—
are sometimes less confusing when applied to the Godhead than the seemingly more suitable abstract terms such as light, life, intelligence and mind.

But Colet adds an important qualifier to the Dionysian preference for concrete terminology by noting that this concrete "kind of writing did the sacred writers of old employ... as being both necessary and useful" (CCH, p. 14). This association of concrete symbolism with the "writers of old," the prophets of the Old Testament, recurs when Colet notes that the symbolic "veil wrought by Moses is of such a kind as to conceal from the ungodly the precious things of God, and yet to teach the good somewhat; though it be not the truth itself, yet at least [it is] some shadow of the truth" (CEH, p. 173). In contrast to Dionysius, Colet places concrete descriptions of the divine in a historical perspective; the use of concrete terminology in the Old Testament was "necessary" in that it appealed to the ruder natures of the ancient Hebrews and helped to bring this lesser sort into some conformity with the good. Colet also suggests that this "veiled" truth of Moses was transformed, through Christ, into a truer and more perfect semblance of the divine; because of Christ's embodiment of God in this world, men are more able to discern truth and less needful of terminology suited to the "duller sort."30

In the theological age instituted by Christ, the proper mode of describing God is precisely through the abstract symbols of which Dionysius seems so wary. For Colet, sun, light,
life and fire are terms accessible to all Christians, and the secretive initiation to these names in Dionysius is viewed more as a historical curiosity than a matter for firm belief. Certainly, Colet would not deny the necessity for some initiation into the mysteries of Christianity; in addition, however, he suggests that all who are truly Christian have an accessibility to the divine not found in the pre-Christian era.

Sun, light, life and fire—these are the primary symbols which Colet extracts from Dionysius. God resides at the apex of all hierarchy, both otherworldly and this-worldly, and is symbolized by light, the source of all spiritual, transcendent life. This light, possessed of unity, shining beauty and fiery spirituality, is, in a deviation from Dionysius typical of Colet, pre-eminently figured forth in the mundane world by Christ: "This Sun, shining upon the minds of men . . . , at once unites them in strength, elevates them to the light, kindles them into flame. . ." (EnR, p. 70). For Colet, Christ himself becomes a symbol for the Godhead's totality; a tangible representative of the divine among men, Christ purifies, illuminates and perfects all that is material and thus imperfect. Further, Christ figures forth among men the composite Fatherhead, sonship and loving spirituality of the triune God: "For there was, and is, in our Christ, a Godhead which is one, true and good . . ." (EC, p. 58).

But while Christ is a symbol for the Godhead's totality,
he is also a differentiated person within that totality; while Christ is the "Sun" among men, the undifferentiated Godhead is the light of the entire created universe. In the Letters to Radulphus, Colet describes God's creation of light as a creation of "form"; similarly, Christ lends form to Christianity by shining the divine light into the darkness of this world. As previously indicated, the light from the Godhead in the Mosaic era provided only a partial and imperfect illumination among "de-formed" men. At the incarnation of Christ, the theanthropos, the divine light became manifest in this human world, and the symbolism of the old Mosaic order gave way to the more immediate symbolism of Christianity.

Symbolic light thus emanates from the divine source, providing unity and kindling spiritual fire throughout creation. Both Dionysius and Colet accept this Platonically-derived emanation of light as a symbol for the Godhead. However, both go further by perceiving not only an emanating movement away from the divine source, but also an assimilating movement back towards it. Divinity is not only diffused throughout creation, but it is also reflected back upon itself by those illuminated beings which it has "formed."

Thus there are two opposite universal motions: one transmits the divine light outwards, lending form and substance to an increasing multiplicity of beings, and the other solidifies--unifies--that multiplicity in a reflective harking-back to the Godhead. All hierarchical beings, that is, all beings
which have been formed by the light, are charged with the
duties of receiving the light, reflecting it upwards to the
Godhead, and transmitting it to still more inferior beings
so that they might also receive form.  

Colet is clearly intrigued by the Dionysian symbols of
light, fire and life for God. Indeed, the Areopagite's
magnificent images of God as the sun, the emanator and dis­
tributor of all unity, life, light, form and substance, the
core of the heavenly fire from whence all spiritual warmth
radiates, are compelling ones. Yet, Colet is not unwilling
to tamper with the Dionysian theory—to increase the impor­
tance of Christ, to adjust the theory of evil, to construct
a distinction between pre- and post-Christain symbolism.
Nevertheless, Colet's understanding of God as the source of
light, fire and life is so pervasive that, despite his per­
mutations of Dionysian theory, the Areopagite's influence on
Colet's theory of the Godhead is safely affirmed to be second
only to Paul’s.

In addition to the Godhead, Dionysian otherworldliness
includes the myriad number of celestial beings subordinate
to pure divinity but superior to the human orders. All ex­
isting beings owe their existence to the overflowing nature
of the Godhead, and insofar as they are closer to or more dis­
tant from the overflowing source, they participate to a great­
er or lesser degree in divine illumination. Celestial beings
constitute the intermediate hierarchy between God and the
human hierarchy because they are neither beyond being nor
limited by base matter. Since they are independent of the mundane world, these celestial beings, angels, are a part of a vast universal principle which aids in the transmission of spiritual form to earthly matter; like the "forms" which participate in Plato's Good, Dionysius' celestial beings transmit spiritual essence to their subordinates.

Colet's version of the Celestial Hierarchy echoes much of the original Dionysian scheme, although, again, Colet is quite willing to adapt Dionysius to his personal theological, philosophical and historical views. His principal borrowing, however, is the term "hierarchy" itself—a term which first obtained its general sense of "intelligible order" from Dionysius.\(^37\) For Dionysius, "hierarchy" retains some of its earlier sense as a "priestly organization" and he explicitly defines it as "a holy order, knowledge and activity leading, as much as is fitting, to the God-form."\(^{38}\) Further, he establishes its goal as the unification of its members with God, insofar as such a unification is possible.\(^{39}\)

Dionysian hierarchy does not include only the earthly priesthood; rather, it comprehends the organization of the entire universe and even permeates the nature of God (in a perfected form), so that all created beings reflect the perfect order of the divine \textit{mous}. Created beings thus participate in an integral relationship with God; collectively, they are "cooperators with God" (\textit{εἰςοὐ εὐεργετῶν}) in that they manifest the divine perfection of beings in accordance with divine form.\(^{40}\) Through cooperation, created beings are
drawn closer to unification with the Godhead, and, having been unified, they attain the goal of all hierarchy.

In the Dionysian scheme, beings progress towards divine unification through the activities of purification, illumination and perfection. All hierarchic beings perform all three of these activities, to a greater or lesser degree, but each level of hierarchic being possesses a single, characteristic activity peculiar only to itself. Thus, Seraphim, the highest angelic order, perfect; Cherubim, the next highest order, illuminate; Thrones, third amongst the highest orders of angels, purify. Having received the divine illumination from God, the true "Perfection," each being in each order performs its specific activity so that the divinely inspired universal order can be fully exhibited and transmitted to those hierarchic beings below it.

Colet appropriates Dionysius' understanding of hierarchy in his treatise on the Celestial Hierarchy:

The whole endeavour of all spiritual beings is to represent God. God first by his power makes like himself those beings who are near him; then they make others like in turn. Thus there proceeds a diffusion of the Deity from order to order, from hierarchy to hierarchy, and from better creatures to worse, according to each one's capacity, for the rendering godlike of all (CEH, p. 15).

Significantly, Colet emphasizes the function of beings as representatives, as symbols, for the divine. By purifying, illuminating and perfecting, beings represent the divine functions and activities of purification, illumination and perfection, symbolizing in their lower and multiple manner
those divine qualities of which they cannot truly conceive. All created beings, according to Dionysius, are manifestations of some facet of the Godhead, and they therefore partially symbolize the divine. Similarly, for both Dionysius and Colet, beings imitate some aspect of the overflowing Godhead, and thus become participants in the divine activities.

Colet rather passively accepts the Dionysian idea of hierarchy, and the Neoplatonist's metaphysical organization of celestial beings is taken over almost verbatim in Colet's Celestial Hierarchy. Here, Colet follows Dionysius' original division of the nine angelic orders into three separate triads: 1) Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, 2) Dominations, Virtues, Powers, 3) Princedoms, Archangels, Angels. The first triad, as I have already indicated, correlates the Seraphim with perfection, the Cherubim with illumination and the Thrones with purification. The Seraphim, the angels closest to the Godhead, are said to be burning with divine love, the Cherubim to be abundant in knowledge, and the Thrones to be most pure in simplicity and steadfastness; all of these orders pass on to their subordinates their respective abilities, strive to raise the lower orders and try to become closer themselves to the divine source of light, life and fire. Further, this triad as a whole is a perfected symbol for other celestial triads, and the three orders of the first triad constantly try to perfect the second triad, the triad of illumination. And again,
within the second triad, Dominations are aligned with perfection, Virtues with illumination and Powers with purification. Similarly, the last triad—that of purification—carries out within its orders the emanational decrease from perfecting Princedoms to purifying Angels.

Both Dionysius and Colet make various distinctions, correspondences and symbolisms among the various orders, but these particulars are not of great importance here. Of more importance is the relation of the celestial hierarchy to the Godhead. In accordance with the usual Neoplatonic symbol of God as light, the Dionysian celestial hierarchy is a medium through which the divinity is diffused throughout the universe, including the mundane world. Certainly, Dionysius would confirm the importance of celestial beings in and of themselves, but because he also affirms that one purpose of hierarchic being is transmission of the divine, the importance of celestial beings as a link between God and man becomes apparent. In short, celestial beings, in that they provide a link with the Godhead, have a redemptive function for men.

Obviously, this redemptive role of the angelic orders conflicts with the orthodox view of Christ as the redeemer of men. At the very least, Dionysius introduces some confusion into traditional Christian soteriology. Dionysius is clearly not a Monophysite, but there has been no serious explanation of Christ's soteriological function in the Dionysian scheme. The Areopagite apparently views Christ as
a redeemer who leads men back to the light, and as superior to all hierarchic beings, including the angels; he is "a being beyond being made substance according to men out of the substance of men." Yet, the function of Christ in the hierarchic system is a peripheral one, and the immediate means of human salvation would appear to be the mediating activities of the angelic orders.

Again, one must recall the metaphysical character of the Dionysian writings; Dionysius establishes an order of beings ranging from the Platonic supra-Being--God--to the multiplicity of material beings in the mundane world. In that Colet virtually transcribes much of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, it is safe to assume that the Dean possessed some degree of interest in Dionysius' "revealed" metaphysics, despite the latter's failure to substantively treat the role of Christ. Insofar as the Neoplatonic concept of divine emanation is compatible with Pauline Christianity, Colet is quite willing to integrate the Dionysian hierarchic scheme into his own world-view.

Colet nowhere openly disputes the Dionysian emphasis on hierarchic rather than Christologic redemption, but he quietly interjects his personal view of Christ as the primary redemptive force throughout his treatises on the hierarchies. The result is a subtle underpinning to the Dionysian scheme which, although not antithetical to the hierarchic system, certainly alters its character. Moreover, this underpinning, based upon the historical perspective already noted in
relation to Dionysian symbolism, is a pervasive element in all of Colet's works.

Just as the mode of symbolism shifted from the Mosaic order's distant metaphors for the Word to the more accessible and truer illumination of God through Christ, so too, Colet implies, the indirect manifestation of the divine among men by the angelic hierarchies weakly preceded the Deity's direct manifestation in Christ. More importantly, the salvific efficacy of the angelic orders was superseded by the assimilation of man by God in Christ's death and resurrection. According to Colet, the angels became "weary of" in their efforts to redeem men, and "then did Jesus Christ, who is himself Order . . . come to their aid . . . in order that men also, being fellow-workers in Christ for the glorifying of God, may at length form a finished hierarchy on earth, to be made equal hereafter to the angels in heaven" (CCH, pp. 15-16). Through Christ, the Godhead sought to repair the imperfect human order; the angelic orders' vain efforts to bring the Hebrews into the light culminated in God's incarnate presence in this world. According to Colet, Christ's divine activities of purifying, illuminating and perfecting on earth fulfilled the previously imperfect human hierarchy, thereby bringing spiritual order—the essence of hierarchy—to men. In that the angels are superior to men, their hierarchy is a model for the Christian hierarchy, and both are established "according to the pattern of . . . [Christ's] own truth" (CCH, p. 28).
The exact reasons for Colet's alterations of the Dionysian system are unclear. But it can be affirmed that, although wanting to maintain the basic outline of Dionysian metaphysics, Colet desired to bring Dionysius' redemptive emphasis more closely in line with Paul's. Also, Colet must have noticed that Dionysius' terminology for the angels was primarily taken from the Old Testament, particularly the books of Zachary, Ezechiel, Daniel and Isaiah. Given Colet's perception of an emphatic division between the Mosaic and Christian orders,50 Dionysius' dependence on the Old Testament may have led Colet to associate the hierarchic system as a whole with the Mosaic order. Whatever Colet's true sentiments were, however, the result is clear: angels imperfectly redeemed men in the Mosaic order, and Christ perfectly redeems men in the Christian order.

Colet's redemptive system, despite its alteration of the angelic hierarchy's role among men, still draws heavily upon Dionysius' transmissive principle. In fact, this concept of the diffusion and imitation of God by the angelic and human orders is Colet's principal debt to Dionysius:

For . . . in what I have learnt in that treatise [Dionysius' Celestial Hierarchy], this is the very first and chiefest principle, that whatsoever benefit we have received from other sources, we should freely share and communicate in succession to others. Since herein we imitate the inestimable goodness of God, who bestows and imparts himself in due order to all . . . to the intent that it should in turn be straightway transmitted by the receiver to another . . . . (CCH, pp. 1-2).

Beings must not only passively receive the divine emanations; they must also imitate that true divinity insofar as they can.
In both Colet and Dionysius, hierarchy is not static; instead, the angelic and human hierarchies form a dynamic system in which this world is brought into a closer conformity with the more perfect other world.

Colet describes this angelic dynamism as the motive force for the diffusion of divine grace—that which is emanated from the Godhead—among men under the law of Moses. Before reaching these men, the true light first passed through the multiple orders of angels so that it could be filtered down, as it were, for humanity's weaker nature. Colet states: "that which flows from God in a pure, simple, and unmixed state upon the angels, to promote their stability, order and perfection, when it further proceeds to men, declining from its purity and simplicity, becomes . . . to some degree perceptible to their senses" (CCH, p. 4). In the pre-Christian era, man was limited to sensible symbols for the Godhead and thus "imitated the angels by bodily objects and sensible signs, not by intellectual and spiritual" (CCH, p. 5). Conversely, men in the Christian era do have access to intellectual and spiritual signs, insofar as intellectuality and spirituality are possible in the sensible world: "In truth the Church, whilst we are here in the body, neither is, nor can be, without sensible signs; but they are here in due measure, and are very needful for keeping weaker members in the Church, that they may be admonished by sense when they are receiving the Spirit within their soul" (CCH, pp. 5-6). While the human condition requires symbols based upon sense,
these are only functional, in the Christian era, insofar as they allow men to enter into the divine Spirit and complete their assimilation to God—an assimilation which, according to Colet, was almost impossible before the incarnation.

The role of angelic hierarchy among men is thus clearly related to Colet's distinction between Mosaic and Christian symbolism, and, in a real sense, both symbolic eras are parts of his single historical perspective. Symbolism and spiritual transmission are key concepts in Colet's world-view, and these have their origin in the Pseudo-Dionysian writings. In both authors, angelic hierarchy—the holy order, knowledge and activity—functions as a model for humanity. Dionysius' metaphysics provides Colet with an order for the created universe conformable to scriptural revelation, a knowledge of hierarchic order through which beings determine their true relationship with the divine, and an activity which at once unifies beings with God and compels them to lead other, inferior beings to unity. All hierarchic order, knowledge and activity are, however, mere symbols of the true perfection of order, knowledge and activity in the supra-Being. Created being, insofar as it is good, imitates the divine archetype and works out in essence the Godhead's overflowing supra-essence; in turn, each created being, insofar as it is perfected, itself overflows in transmitting the Godhead to succeeding orders.

Colet's interest in the Dionysian system is not limited just to his treatises on the hierarchies. Hierarchic
emanation and assimilation are frequently applied to his general understanding of the contrasting Mosaic and Christian eras, as I have already indicated. Further, Dionysius strongly influences Colet's cosmology.

Despite the opinions of some Dionysian critics, the Pseudo-Areopagite nowhere indulges in cosmology per se. Rather than outlining the universe's physical structure, Dionysian metaphysics is primarily concerned with a description of universal ontology--of the relationships among varying orders of being. In Colet's commentary on I Corinthians 12, however, one discovers that the former Oxford divinity student has developed a surprisingly complete physical cosmology—a cosmology derived from the Ptolemaic system of the universe and corresponding to the Dionysian hierarchic scheme.

Colet first establishes the three worlds of which "the one undivided Universe consists" (EC, p. 129): the spiritual, planetary and sublunary. The planetary world is similar to the spiritual or angelic world; the Seraphic order corresponds to the ninth sphere of the Ptolemaic system—the Primum Mobile; the Cherubim correspond to the eighth sphere—the firmament of the fixed stars; the Thrones are associated with Saturn's sphere, and so on down to Angels which correspond to the lunar sphere. In the sublunary world, nine divisions based upon elemental principles range from the "ninth region of unmixed fire" to "the absolute density of earth" (EC, p. 129).

Within each of these worlds, Colet continues, additional nine-fold classifications can be established, such as nine
orders of stars, metals, stones, plants and fish. Further, each nine-fold order must have a leader (dux), or tenth member, superior to the rest, which completes the "round and perfect and heavenly form and figure" (EC, p. 126) of the series. For the angels, this tenth would be God, for the planets, the Sun, and above the sublunar realm, the moon. Like the Dionysian hierarchies, each world has an internal gradation from the best, which is closest to the tenth, to the worst, which is farthest from it.

Of course, Colet has a more specific purpose in this digression than mere speculation; he is quick to apply this nine-fold ordering to the Christian hierarchy with Christ as the tenth. According to Colet, the Mosaic hierarchy, lacking a tenth, was hierarchically as well as symbolically inferior to the perfected Christian hierarchy (EC, p. 132). Certainly, one cannot deduce from this passage that Colet developed a universal cosmic system, that he was a "naturalist," or that he was an original pre-Copernican cosmologist. In this passage, however, it is apparent that the Dionysian hierarchic system was not abandoned when Colet turned from the Areopagite to Paul. Here, as in Colet's other scriptural commentaries, the Dionysian influence emerges from the background, comes into clearer focus, and fades again as the digression turns back to the original text.

From Dionysius' otherworldliness, Colet appropriates the Godhead's symbolism and the transmissive character of the angelic hierarchies. The transcendent world in the
Dionysian system is, as I have intimated, by no means static; because the Godhead's divine emanation is an overflowing of itself, the source of all being paradoxically exists in an extension of itself throughout creation and a drawing of that creation back to its stable and unified source. Thus, there is a constant motion and stability in the Dionysian metaphysics—a transmissive movement and symbolic stability which Colet is quick to apply to his own works. But for both authors, this otherworldly motion and stability is accessible to man; although their soteriologies drastically differ, both see an otherworldly salvation as a positive reality for mankind.

In the Neoplatonic tradition, this-worldliness, comprehending all that is mundane, ephemeral and transitory, is the necessary correlative to the idealized perfection, unity and timelessness of otherworldliness. Just as in the Symposium, Socrates, having reached a pinnacle of otherworldly vision at the conclusion of his narration of Diotima's speech, is thrust back to mundane reality by noisy revelers, so the Neoplatonic vision of otherworldliness must be balanced by the imperfect realities of this world. Always, then, this world constitutes a stark contrast with the perfection of the transcendent world, and this particular Neoplatonic characteristic emerges forcefully in Dionysius and Colet.

The notion of historical perspective, which I have already introduced concerning the Godhead and the hierarchies,
is crucial to Dionysius' and Colet's understanding of this world, since only beings in this world can rightly have a temporal history. In contrast to Colet, however, Dionysius makes little use of this perspective. That Dionysius does distinguish between the Mosaic and Christian eras is evident; in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, he notes that, in the mundane world, God first instituted the \( \nu \omega \mu \alpha \nu \iota \epsilon \rho \alpha \rho \chi \iota \alpha \nu \), the Hierarchy under the Law, which was to impart faint semblances of the truth through Moses and his priests. The Hierarchy under the Law was, according to Dionysius, an image of the divine truth exposed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 25:40), those under the Law remained uninitiated into the true revelation established by Christ. Those who live in the Christian hierarchy, the initiates, possess a more perfect revelation, fulfillment and holy inheritance, and this hierarchy's nature is "both heavenly and legal, like the mean between extremes, common to the one, by intellectual contemplations, and to the other, because it is variegated by sensible signs." Through Christ, the legal Mosaic hierarchy was transformed to an illuminated model of the celestial hierarchy, insofar as such a transformation was possible in the sensible world.

The legal hierarchy itself provided an order for the still more disorganized, post-lapsarian human condition. Following the paradisical fall, humanity lost its claim to eternal life, and "having willingly fallen from the Divine and elevating life, it was carried to the contrary extremity
--the variableness of many passions, and lead astray, and
turned aside from the strait way leading to the true God,—
and subjected to destructive and evil-working multitudes."62
As Dionysius implies, the boundless sympathy of God did not
relax the bondage of "rebellious multiplicity" until the
coming of Christ and the establishment of a permanent divine
presence in the rite of communion. Still, the Hierarchy of
the Law prepared the way for Christian participation in the
divine by legally binding its members to the unified Godhead.
The Hebrews, because of their conformity to the divine will,
distinguished themselves from other nations that, through
conceit and self-will, failed to make recompense for the par-
adisical transgression.63

But while these historical views are present in Diony-
sius, their place in his entire metaphysics is minimal. There
is almost no distinction between the two human hierarchies in
his discussion of the Godhead and the celestial hierarchy.
Colet, on the other hand, weaves this historicism into the
very marrow, as it were, of his religious system.

Some of Colet's interest in the historical nature of the
human hierarchies must be attributed to Paul. In Romans 4,
for instance, Paul distinguishes between the works of the
Law and justification through faith, the former being in
themselves unable to lead to salvation. Paul also contrasts
Adam's original sin with the conquering of that sin by Jesus
Christ (Romans 5:12-19; I Corinthians 15:22, 47); Colet
echoes this contrast in his discussion of Christ as the
"second Adam": "Adam was the first minister of God in the propagation of the flesh to death; the second Adam was the minister of God in the propagation of the spirit to life" (my translation; SE, pp. 54-55).

Dionysius' notion of the Hierarchy of the Law is itself indebted to Pauline influence, but the Areopagite was the first to integrate the Mosaic order into his hierarchic apparatus. And Colet absorbs this integration from Dionysius; the carnal progeny of Adam and Eve, "having progressed in things of the spirit initiated by Christ, are destined to be spiritually perfected, unto the limits of those that are carnal" (my translation; SE, p. 64). Clearly, Colet here adapts the Dionysian notion of spiritual perfection to Paul's ideas of the fall and Christian redemption.

Colet conceives of the Mosaic and Christian hierarchies as inverse mirror-images; the sins and human failures recorded in the Old Testament are entirely reversed in the New Testament. Not only is Adam an inverse image of Christ, but Eve inversely prefigures the Church, and the fleshly marriage of the carnal progenitors in Eden inversely symbolizes the spiritual marriage of the Son of God and the Church. The offspring of the paradisical union were children of the flesh; the offspring of the spiritual union is justice (SE, p. 64). According to Colet, each failure of the first men is answered and justified in Christianity. Although the Hierarchy of the Law was established to draw men towards the Godhead, and although the letter of the Law, if followed, could have helped
the Jews to approach divine illumination and justified faith, the Law itself was principally a "giver of good and wholesome precepts" rather than a full entrance into the spirit of God; by the Law's "admonitions, and the boundaries it defined, it pointed out transgressions; but strength, whereby a man might restrain himself from wandering and going crooked, it gave none" (EnR, p. 17). Conversely, the Christian hierarchy is devoted to salvation through the spirit (EnR, p. 25), and the Christian law is necessarily subordinate to that spirit. Under the Law, the Jews could not be justified, unless, like Moses, they received a purer spiritual awakening. If made aware of their disorder and "natural powerlessness" before God, the Jews, according to Colet, had yet to be "healed by grace"—God's overflowing love made accessible to men through Christ. In Edmund's Romans, Colet distinguishes between the carnal and spiritual Jew. The former, although practicing the outward signs of faith, could not "baffle" God, who had promised salvation only to the spiritual Jew restored by grace (ExR, p. 96). Insofar, then, as the Hierarchy of the Law was able to produce the spiritual Jew, quickened by God's grace as well as obedient to the Law, its members received an illumination unavailable to the Gentiles (EC, p. 13).

In addition to developing these latent points in Dionysius' distinction between the Mosaic and Christian hierarchies, Colet also extends the Dionysian metaphor of light into another contrast between these hierarchies:
Under Moses the system of the Hebrews, and their Synagogue, was such as to contain a measure of light in very much shade. Whilst, on the other hand, we are here in the Church of Christ, there is very great light, but at the same time along with it some darkness and shade; yet still so overpowered by the light, that it should rather be called colour than shade. For colour consists of darkness and light (CCH, p. 5).

Following the paradisical fall, mankind was thrown into utter spiritual darkness, a darkness which remained unalleviated until God, "screening his rays" by means of the angelic hierarchy (CEH, pp. 104-5), instituted the Mosaic hierarchy. This shadow of spirituality was itself transformed into colorful light by the physical presence of the divine truth in Christ. But even the Christian hierarchy is to be superseded by a perfected human order with access to God's fiery, "unclouded light" (CEH, p. 105) and with no material or sensible restrictions. In this final and future perfection, the human hierarchy will at last shed its dependence upon sensible symbols and turn itself wholly towards the divine light.

As O'Kelly has noted, Colet's world is in fieri as well as in esse. Dionysius, on the other hand, is silent about mankind's future condition; although the Pseudo-Areopagite would certainly affirm the soteriological necessity of the individual's salvation, he ignores the possibility of an essential upgrading of the human hierarchy. In Colet's view, mankind can and will regard the true form of God "face to face," in the manner of the angelic orders. Based upon scriptural revelation and the historical progression from man's lapsed state to the institution of the Christian hier-
archy, Colet envisions a perfected state of the human race and an apocalyptic transcendence of united Christianity into the Godhead itself. For Dionysius, the particular functions of Christianity are to bring mankind into a hierarchic conformity with the rest of the created universe and to partake of the divine light, insofar as it is possible for men to do so. According to Colet, mankind will, through its imitation of Christ, transcend its present nature, tied as it is to this "animal and bestial part" (EnR, p. 22), and partake in the celestial view of the Godhead long possessed only by angels. Thus, Colet's Christian hierarchy is in the process of becoming an essentially superior order, not, as Dionysius would have it, a better version of the same type of being.

With its emphasis on "becoming" rather than static "being," Colet's historical perspective leads naturally to an association of the three Christian eras—the Mosaic, Christian and the "hierarchy triumphant" (CEH, p. 52)—with the hierarchic activities of purifying, illuminating and perfecting. The Mosaic hierarchy purifies men by drawing them into order; the Christian hierarchy "reveals and illumines" so that men might have a clearer insight; the final and incomplete hierarchy will inspire love so that men may become perfect in a burning love for the Godhead (CCH, p. 40). Further, this association of the divine activities and the temporal orders suggests a similarity with the triadic Pauline virtues of faith, hope and charity (I Corinthians 13:13). Although
Dionysius ignores the Pauline virtues altogether, Colet develops a series of correspondences in which the Mosaic order is associated with hope, the Christian order with faith, and the "hierarchy triumphant," one may infer, will be characterized by pure love (CCH, p. 41).68

In addition to this historical view of mankind, Colet also constructed a consistent, albeit an unsystematic, theory of human nature. Not surprisingly, Colet's view of human nature follows the traditional dualism of body and spirit. His descriptions of the body have contributed to his oversimplified image as the "gloomy dean." He bleakly describes the post-lapsarian world as a place "where all is black and cold, all naturally conflicting and opposed" (MB, p. 31) and carnal men as born with a natural inclination to multiplicity, separation and prideful self-reliance as a result of Adam's fall. "Weakness, folly, and wickedness" are, according to Colet, absolutely and essentially parts of human nature, and all that man has accomplished in society, customs, art, and his occupations are nothing unless motivated by the workings of the Holy Spirit (EC, p. 121). Certainly, Colet cannot be considered a positivist. In point of fact, however, Colet merely states in stronger language a position to which every Platonist is vulnerable; by separating positive form from negative matter, the Dean is understandably led to the conclusion that matter borders on evil itself.

Although men "fell below nature" (ExR, p. 162) because of Adam and Eve, men have always had the potential, with the
Godhead's help, to be led back to some semblance of pre-lapsarian truth. At the institution of the Mosaic Law, the sub-human chaos and multiplicity which had reigned since the fall were brought into a firmer order and placed on a "level with man," that is, a level consistent with man's true nature. Under the Christian "law of grace," men participate in a "law above man." Moreover, in man's pre-lapsarian condition, the "inner man" or soul governed man's "animal and bestial part" in a natural harmony; after the fall and before Christ, man's carnality became dominant over the soul, creating the bondage of the flesh (EnR, p. 22). The Christian administration of grace leads men back to the dominance of spirit over flesh. Thus, the break-down of world order after Adam's willful rejection of God's law can be salved by man's willful acceptance of Christian grace.

For Colet, spirituality is a real component of human nature; although man frequently errs through weakness, he is not inherently evil insofar as he possesses some manifestation of grace in his spiritual nature. This spiritual part of man, his form-giving soul, "consists of intellect and will. By the intellect we have our wisdom; by the will, our power. The wisdom of the intellect is Faith; the power of the will is Love" (EC, p. 12). Wisdom (sapientia), the illumination transmitted from the Godhead, is, on the human level, composed of teaching and faith, and it constitutes the knowledge of divine things (EC, p. 61). Spiritual wisdom is the penetration of earthly sensible symbols by the light of divine
truth (EC, p. 63). Will, on the other hand, is associated with the Dionysian concept of fiery love, composed of warmth and "clear flame," which draws Christian men towards the divine and provides a transmissive power.

Colet's view of will is derived from Augustine's anti-Pelagian position that men ultimately have the choice of whether or not to accept grace despite God's gift of grace to all men:

Man's will is the cause why he receives it [grace]; and at the same time the light is the cause why his soul wills. The spirit, when warmed by grace, in its own freedom chooses the good, which in that same freedom it can refuse (CCH, p. 29).

Men thus conform to God's will only if they have accepted God's grace; having accepted it, they are drawn to will as God desires them to will. Nevertheless, they always retain the freedom to refuse God's grace and consequently his will. Although Sears Jayne is justified in seeking an immediate source for Colet's Augustinian concept of will in Ficino, it is also apparent that Colet drew upon Dionysius' emanation scheme to complete his view. In Dionysius and Colet, evil is the result of non-participation in the good and a weakness of the individual.

According to Colet, then, men are composed of carnal and spiritual natures; further, they are capable of understanding the Godhead's reality in Christ and can willfully choose to accept divine grace. In the Christian hierarchy, men are able to understand, as well as to love, God, and their will provides the active counterpart to passive faith.
In his historical perspective, Colet concludes that the Jews under the Mosaic Law were "ignorant because of depravity of will" and that the Gentiles, those outside the weak light of the Law, were "depraved of will because of their ignorance" (EC, pp. 12-13).

In his various discussions of the historical hierarchies and the nature of man, Colet principally depends upon Paul's epistles, but again the Dionysian influence is unmistakable. Another key concept in Colet's theology, the mystical body of Christ, is principally derived from Paul's analogy of the Church and human body (I Corinthians 12), but it also shows traces of Dionysian influence. The mystical body, although never explicitly mentioned by Dionysius, is nevertheless compatible with the Dionysian hierarchic scheme; Colet draws out this compatibility in his commentary on I Corinthians:

And because that microcosm, man, is an epitome of the whole universe, resembling in his spiritual faculties the nine orders of angels; it follows that he will resemble the heaven in the more refined part of his body, and the sublunary in the lowest part (EC, p. 133).

Because man can be considered a "microcosm" of the universe, his physical and mental organs can be likened to other aspects of the universe. According to Colet, analogies can be drawn between many physical and spiritual levels of being, including the cosmic relationship between man's spiritual part and the heavenly spheres. Despite the apparent diversity and multiplicity of the human body, there is, Colet asserts, a stable order controlled by "one leading member," its head. The Christian Church has, therefore, Christ as its
head, and the multiplicity of its members as organs. But while Christ is the superior member of the "body," the whole gains its motive force from the Spirit: "The whole church, indeed, is nothing else than an organ and instrument of the Spirit of God, as the body is of the soul" (EC, p. 134). Quickened by the energizing activity of the Spirit, the mystical body should function in "concord and harmonious agreement," with each member in fruitful union with the whole.

As Colet points out in Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, this unity, bound together by the Spirit, should communicate to each member Christ's "own essence and power," in proportion to that member's participation in the whole (MB, p. 38). Paul's metaphor illustrates, therefore, the fundamental similarity in purpose of Christ, the god-man, and Christian men; as the head of the mystical body, Christ controls all bodily functions and leads to a perfected and healthy whole.

The mystical body is "mystical" in that it figures forth in a sensible sign the transcendent unity of all Christians. As a transcendent symbol, it indicates the elevation of the Christian hierarchy as a whole, not just the elevation of individuals. It is as a unit, Colet asserts, that men "are sanctified, and born saints in Christ, that along with him . . . [they] may be sons of God" (MB, p. 43). This use of symbolism as a unifying, transcendent link between the divine and mundane worlds, is, as I have earlier intimated, a Dionysian characteristic which Colet here independently adapts to the Pauline metaphor of the mystical body. Whereas Dionysius
is primarily concerned with the transcendence of the individual, however, Colet envisions a transcendence of the entire Christian hierarchy—the "hierarchy triumphant."

In addition, Colet clearly indicates that the Spirit, the third person of the triune God, is the enduring influence of the Godhead among men after Christ's ascension. The Spirit, "the soul of the Church" (MB, p. 44), transmits a life-giving divinity and heals the wounds of schisms and separations in the mystical body; it unites all men in its fellowship so "that what happens in a part only, is felt throughout the whole" (MB, p. 45). Thus, the Spirit catalytically binds the Church together by transmitting divine wisdom and will to men, and this transmission again suggests Dionysius' principle of emanation.

In order to penetrate to the heart of Dionysius' influence upon Colet's concept of this world, however, one must turn to the Dean's treatises on the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and De Sacramentis Ecclesiae. Although Colet's historical perspective, his views on human nature and the mystical body are all central to his notion of human nature, his understanding of right human action, as outlined in these treatises, is of greater significance in Colet's view of this world.

Dionysius' ecclesiastical hierarchy is, like the celestial hierarchy, a sacred order, knowledge and activity which strives to draw inferior beings up to God. Included within this mundane hierarchy is, moreover, a comprehensive system of sacramental rites administered through the guidance of
God, the "Head of Hierarchy" and "Fountain of Life." These divinely inspired rites are performed under the direction of earthly hierarchs (bishops) and the revealed authority of scriptural "oracles." Having been transmitted from the Godhead to men via sacred symbols, these oracles are "the essence of . . . [human] Hierarchy," and, according to Dionysius, their gnostic, secretive sense must be preserved from all those who are uninitiated and likely to profane the divine Word. In addition, the oracles are veiled under sensible symbols because of man's inability to perceive what is supra-sensible.

An important element in Dionysius' ecclesiastical hierarchy is his desire for secrecy concerning divine things; the Areopagite constantly reiterates that his readers should pass on the meaning of sacred rites and orders only to those properly initiated into the faith. Colet seems to view this secretive sense in Dionysius as an historical curiosity, despite his continuing interest in Dionysian symbolism and transmission. He notes that the oral tradition in the primitive Church has in large measure been lost since, as in any oral communication of divine matters, the speaker must have had the sacred symbol either explained or revealed to him; "otherwise the vision of man must needs be baffled" (CEH, p. 58). But, at any rate, Colet has little use for the gnosticism which fills the Dionysian writings.

Dionysius extends his principle of nine hierarchic orders grouped into three triads to his mundane hierarchy.
Within this hierarchy, the three triads "are divided into the most holy ministration of the Mystic Rites, and into the Godlike ministers of holy things, and those who are being conducted by them, according to their capacity, to things holy." At the topmost level of the hierarchy is, then, the triad of sacramental functions. This is followed by the triads of ecclesiastics, who perform the sacramental rites, and those for whom the elevating rites are performed, the mass of Christians inclined towards divine truth.

At first sight, the inclusion of sacramental rites as an hierarchic triad may seem obscure; it is undeniably difficult to understand ministrative activity as a "being" consistent with the other orders of angelic and human beings. Nevertheless, Dionysius establishes this triad with little explanation. As an hierarchic triad, the sacramental orders must conform to the universal activities of purifying, illuminating and perfecting, and, as Dionysius states, they have, when administered, "as first Godlike power, the holy cleansing of the uninitiated; and as middle, the enlightening instruction of the purified; and as last, and summary of the former, the perfecting of those instructed in science of their proper instruction." Modelled after the divine movement from unity to fiery perfection, the sacrament of baptism is associated with the combined activities of purification and illumination while communion and the consecration of the oils are, according to Dionysius, the means by which men receive a perfected knowledge of God's works and move
into the closest possible unity with the Godhead.

Although Colet does not explicitly indicate an understanding of the sacraments as a hierarchic triad, he does recognize the symbolic activities which they perform in the Dionysian scheme. Through the enlivening Spirit of the mystical body, the sacraments function not merely as symbolic rites, but also as means of transmitting the divine truth to men: ". . . so figures and sacraments may be means towards the truth, and towards men's being brought to the truth by the Spirit of truth" (CEH, p. 61). The function of the sacraments, then, is to illuminate and perfect men by leading them to the very substance of truth itself.

Colet also expands the Dionysian notion of sacraments by emphasizing the central role of Christ in their enactment; for Colet, all sacraments are symbols in sensible form of Christ's incarnation and acts among men (CEH, pp. 61-66). In addition, sacramental activity is not specific to mankind alone. The angelic orders perform the priestly rites by purifying, illuminating and perfecting, and they constitute "the priesthood of the most holy spirits in the heavens" (my translation; SE, p. 38); in turn, their priesthood is, according to Colet, the sacramentorum sacramentum. Because they are essentially superior to men, the angelic orders perform their sacramental duties in a more perfect manner; thus, by imitating the angelic performance of the sacraments, men can accomplish their task of making the earthly hierarchy a model of the celestial.
For Dionysius, the principal sacramental ministrations are baptism, communion and the consecration of the holy oils. These three, before all other sacramental ministrations, enact the hierarchic functions of purifying, illuminating and perfecting.

Baptism, which is alternately termed an act of divine rebirth (τελέοντας ψυχήν) and an act of illumination (φωτισμός), at once purifies the initiate by bringing him into the unity of those reborn in God and enlightens him by making the presence of the Holy Spirit intelligible. Each of these spiritual activities is, according to Dionysius, symbolized by the sensible activities of the baptismal rite. Thus, the initiate's purification is symbolized by his removal of the old clothes—those associated with the old life—and his total immersion in the baptismal waters, signifying the death of the former, profane man. The initiate's emergence from the water and re-entry into light is the beginning of his illuminated, spiritual life, and the symbolism is completed by his putting on of new robes, "white as light," and his unction in the "good odour" of holy oils.79

In contrast to Colet, Dionysius' sacramentorum sacramentum is the sacred rite of communion (συνάντησις), and its principle function is to lead men to perfection—to a union with God over and above their union with other members of the hierarchy. Accordingly, the sensible symbols prescribed for the communion rite—the reading from the Psalter and Scriptures, the removal of the uninitiated from the holy
premises, the consecration and distribution of the bread and wine—all together must lead to the "utmost union of the things distributed with those who receive them." That which had been damaged by man's fall is completely restored in the communion rite by the human participation in "a supermundane elevation, and an inspired polity in . . . religious assimilation" to the Godhead. For Dionysius, communion offers men the opportunity for a continual renewal of the divine incarnation; insofar as the symbolic bread and wine are infused with divine spirit, thus far can men directly participate in the Godhead.

A similar consecration occurs in the sacrament of holy oils (\textit{Mv\varphi\alpha\nu}). Like communion, this sacrament's primary activity is that of perfection. Again, the sensible symbols include liturgical readings and the removal of the uninitiated from the place of consecration. The oil, placed upon the altar during the congregation's "sacred melody" and hierarch's prayers, diffuses its sweet odor throughout the gathering, moving in turn from the most to least holy, so that all may participate in its divine diffusion. This common participation in the oil's fragrance symbolizes the enduring presence of the divine Spirit; like the Seraphim, those attending the consecration fully partake of the divine essence.

These three sacraments, then, form the topmost triad of the Dionysian ecclesiastical hierarchy. Given Colet's historical perspective and his pervasive emphasis on Christ as
the creator and caretaker of the spiritual human hierarchy, it is not surprising that he again subtly shifts the Dionysian emphasis upon sacramental symbols of the Godhead to symbols of Christ. In addition, Colet freely intersperses scriptural quotations, almost all taken from the New Testament, throughout his abstract in order to demonstrate the latent correspondences between the rites of primitive Christianity and Christian revelation.

In his digressions from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Colet exhibits a curiosity and interest in the contrasts between early Church ritual and that of his own time. In his Celestial Hierarchy, Colet adapts the Dionysian scheme to his personal views of theology and religious history, but he seldom demonstrates an interest in the historical nature of the Dionysian system itself. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, however, shows Colet reflecting upon many changes in ritual and actively comparing primitive rites with those of the 15th century. He appends the following comment to his discussion of the Dionysius baptismal rite:

And this form differs very greatly from the one we make use of in this age. And herein I own that I marvel, how it is that in one and the same old-established religion, there should be so dissimilar a rite; since it would seem that we ought to be more careful in preserving our ceremonies, than the Jews were in theirs... (CEH, p. 69).

Colet does not examine the Dionysian texts solely with an eye for the acquisition of theological support or ideas; rather, he compares what he believes to be purer Christian rituals with the more corrupt versions of his age. In this
comparison, he discovers that, for Dionysius, confirmation was a part of the baptismal rite rather than a separate sacrament (CEH, p. 75) and that the laving of the priest's hands before communion symbolized the cleric's purity (CEH, pp. 89-90). Like Erasmus, Colet was concerned with the preservation of the spirit of the primitive Church and that spirit's expression in the sacraments.

This interest in rediscovering the practices and beliefs of early Christianity is nowhere more evident than in his discussion of Dionysius' second human triad, the three ministerial orders. According to Dionysius, the ecclesiastical hierarchy bears the same relation to the Hierarchy of the Law as that of the initiate to the uninitiated, and the function of the ministerial orders is to lead the uninitiated to the cleansing sacraments so that they can be purified. Further, they are to conduct the purified to illumination and to perfect the illuminated by completing their divine contemplations. Corresponding to these three functions, Dionysius establishes the three ministerial orders as deacons (\(\Lambda\varepsilon\iota\tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\nu\nu\)), priests (\(\iota\epsilon\rho\varepsilon\omicron\nu\nu\nu\)) and bishops or hierarchs (\(\iota\epsilon\rho\alpha\rho\alpha\nu\nu\nu\)), and each order is charged with duties necessary for the completion of that order's function. Thus, hierarchs reveal the esoteric knowledge of the holy mysteries; priests conduct those to be initiated to the holy rites and demonstrate the works of God in holy symbols; the deacons, who strip and lead the baptismal candidate to the water, turn the uninitiated away from opposing passions and towards the bright unity of
All consecrations of ministers—consecrations which Colet terms "Holy Orders"—differ in particulars according to the individual's rank, but all have certain common procedures. According to Dionysius, all ministerial candidates must kneel before the altar, receive the imposition of the bishop's hand and the sign of the cross, and be announced by the name appropriate to their new rank. These ritual acts demonstrate through material symbols the candidate's subordination to the ministering hierarch and to the Godhead; since all ritual operations require that the minister not only receive the illumination from the Godhead, but also transmit that illumination to inferior ranks, he must himself be firmly committed to the Godhead's superiority in order to act as a transmitter of the divine light.

In his abstract of the Dionysian hierarchy, Colet first compares the Christian hierarchy with the Mosaic order, noting again that Christianity places men in a fuller, more perfect participation in the Godhead than did the old Mosaic order. Further, although Moses viewed God's pure light on Mount Sinai, he set down in the Law only figurative symbols of that light so that it would not be profaned by the rudeness of the Hebrews (CEH, p. 103). In contrast to the allegorical nature of the Old Testament, the language of the New Testament is almost wholly literal, thus demonstrating for Colet the more accessible nature of Christianity. Still, however, even a literal text is figurative in that words can
only be a shadow of the reality they represent. In the New Testament and in the rites of Christianity, verbal and ritual symbols possess a higher anagogic sense—a sense in which one is "raised aloft, so as from the shadow to conceive of the reality" (CEH, p. 106).

Placed in historical perspective, then, the allegories of the Mosaic order are fulfilled in the more perfect anagogic sense of Christianity. Colet develops this digression in order to demonstrate that the Dionysian rituals are anagogic shadows of a true reality, rather than allegories illustrating only a faint semblance of the Godhead. Because Christians possess this higher, anagogic understanding, it is paramount, according to Colet, that the ceremonies and character of the primitive Church be preserved. Insofar as the original ceremonies of Christianity are distorted, thus far has the Church lost its original truth.87

The significance of the distinction between allegorical and anagogic senses becomes clearer when Colet engages himself in an active comparison of Dionysian rituals with those of his own day. When, for instance, Colet speaks of the care with which early priests laved their hands at the communion rite, he breaks into an impassioned apostrophe aimed at the degenerate clerical practices of his contemporaries: "Oh! the abominable impiety of those miserable priests . . . who fear not to rush from the bosom of some foul harlot into the temple of the Church" (CEH, p. 91). And again, when Colet notes the manner in which Dionysius explains the selection of the
twelfth apostle by lot, he criticizes the Church's practices of selling bishoprics and allowing secular rulers to appoint bishops. The consequences of such departures from the practices of primitive Christianity are devastating to the stability of the Christian hierarchy: "Unless Christ have pity on his Church, death, which is already almost at the door, will seize on all. For how shall that endure, which is managed with destructive counsels and murderous hands?" (CEH, p. 124).

Colet measures the clerical confusion and disharmony of his own times against Dionysius' idealized ecclesiastical hierarchy. Thus, at the conclusion of his analysis of the ministerial orders, he parallels Dionysius' vision of human hierarchy with the bald realities of the late 15th century. The Church's system, he states, works to bring men closer to the "glorious example of the angels," so that out of worldly confusion there might emerge some perfected men and a Church "like a city set on a hill, the light of the world and the salt of the earth." This bright system, however, has been tarnished and degraded in Colet's time:

But 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; so that now churchmen, shrouded in darkness... have foolishly blended and confounded themselves...; so that in the world again there is nothing more confused than the mass of men (CEH, p. 126). 90

In contrast to Dionysius' bright otherworldliness, Colet's earthly environment, charged with controversy and schisms at even the topmost ecclesiastical levels, must indeed have
seemed confused.

But lest one should conclude that Colet here shows himself to be the "gloomy dean" after all, and to have forsaken all hope for the restitution of mankind, one should recall Colet's conviction that there will be a "hierarchy triumphant," a real spiritual terminus for man's becoming. Here and elsewhere, Colet walks a narrow line between natural pathos and absolute despair, but when these passages--passages frequently rehearsed by those who see Colet only as a spokesman for righteousness and human damnation--are placed in perspective with the whole of his works, they seem less an absolute denial of man's potential good than a passionate exhortation of his readers to positive action.

In addition to comparing the Dionysian ministerial orders to those of his day, Colet elaborates on the proper nature of the priesthood in *De Sacramentis Ecclesiae*. This treatise, largely devoted to an explanation of priesthood at all hierarchic levels, begins with the assertion that the triune God, the true Teleite or perfection, is himself a priest upon whom all subordinate priesthods are modelled (SE, p. 34). Further, the Godhead is composed of both masculine and feminine parts, with the masculine dominant to the female in strength and ability (SE, p. 72). Within the triune Godhead, God the Father, in that he generated the Son out of himself, is masculine in relation to the feminine Christ; Christ, in turn, is masculine relative to the weaker and more feminine Church. As a part of the Godhead's
ineffable design, Christ made himself the bridegroom of the Church (SE, p. 63). The fruit of this marriage is, according to Colet, the justice which redeems mankind from the paradisical fall. The human priesthood, as the superior members of the Church, must thus enter into a marriage with Christ (SE, p. 66).

Interestingly, Colet is led to this conclusion, in part, because Dionysius fails to discuss marriage as a sacrament in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (SE, p. 66). In sorting out where the 15th century's sacrament of marriage belongs in the hierarchic scheme, Colet makes marriage and the priesthood in Christ equivalent (SE, p. 73). Further, Colet asserts, the nuptial union of Christ and his Church is not a symbol, but truth itself (SE, p. 66). The nature of the priesthood is, then, a true marital union with Christ, a union only crudely symbolized by the carnal marriage of man and wife.

The third and final triad of Dionysius' ecclesiastical hierarchy is that of the initiated (Τελικά ομόμυχον) which, like the sacramental and ministerial orders, is divided into three orders. The lowest order among the initiated, composed of those who are being purified, is further subdivided into three classes of what Dionysius terms the "uninitiated." Led out of the church at the holy consecrations, these comprise the catechumens, those not yet illumined by baptism, the penitent, those who have turned away from the divine light and seek reparation, and the energumens, those possessed by demons or fears contrary to goodness. While all these
classes are divorced from the fully initiated, they yet have received enough light from the higher orders to be set apart from the entirely profane. The second rank of the initiated consists of all who have received baptism's illumination; these contemplate the holy symbols and participate in consecrations. The highest initiated rank is the monastic which, like the ministerial orders, receives a consecration, but is not allowed to perform the sacred rites.  

Colet unquestioningly absorbs these orders and suborders into his own hierarchic scheme, although he does regretfully note the loss of the rites of consecration for monastic candidates (CEH, pp. 135-136). Within the Christian hierarchy, these lowest orders constitute the female "subject-matter of the Church . . . united to the masculine element, that it may be perfected in the male" (CEH, p. 127). In addition, the initiated orders are the booty over which "those armies of God and the Devil contend for the mastery; spirits against spirits, and spiritual men against carnal men" (CEH, p. 127). In this almost Manichean vision of the struggle between good and evil, God can be sometimes overcome by the Devil in the struggle for a human soul; but, in the end, spirit, light, life and God must overcome their evil counterparts (CEH, p. 128).

In his discussion of the initiated triad, Colet provides a kind of summary image for the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy. Because this passage incorporates many of Colet's ideas at once, I will quote from it at length:
The Church of God, which is situated on a hill above the world, in pure air and bright atmosphere, has supplied to it also from the vale of this world's misery the material of its own happiness. For the Church by its lower portion, which is masculine and active, raises upwards the higher and more passive portion of the world; much as the rays of the sun refine and rarefy by their heat the surface portions of water, and so raise them on high; that from it first it may fashion for itself a body, as it were; which body, though coarser and more corporeal than the spiritual part of the Church, is yet more spiritual than the mundane body as a whole. From this body in turn, and more material part of the Church, when sound and health— the most advanced are drawn into a spiritual state, that they may at length be active portions and spirits (CEH, p. 128).96

Here, bound together by Colet's vigorous prose, one finds the Church of God, the heavenly city, the principle of transmission, the symbolism of the divine as light, the dominance of masculine activity over feminine passivity, the mystical body and the Platonic separation of spiritual and material substances. And through it all runs a dynamic, transcendent movement from this world to otherworldliness.

The image of the transcendent Church vividly illustrates the manner in which Dionysius influences Colet's understanding of the Christian hierarchy. From Dionysius, Colet acquires the principle of transmission, and he translates this principle into the Church's masculine and active raising of the feminine and passive world towards the divine light. In this world, the Church ideally provides a source of stability, of "happiness," not otherwise found "in the vale of this world's misery." This sense of happiness and stability is in turn derived from Dionysius' concept of a paradoxically stable and active Godhead. If it imitates God's truth, then the
Church, the bride of Christ and daughter of God the Father, will share in the Godhead's stability.

In contrast to Dionysius' scheme, however, Colet's hierarchy is in the process of becoming the "hierarchy triumphant"; thus the Church's hill figuratively grows as more of the world is drawn into itself. The Church as a whole is pushed closer to the Godhead until, finally, the world's entirety will have been spiritualized, made less earthy, and have received its perfection. The material for the Church's growth is the carnal world, and its increase depends upon men who "will freely share and communicate in succession to others" (CCH, p. 1). Similarly, in the Pauline metaphor of the mystical body, men should strive to bring all members out of the "more material part of the body" and lead them to spiritual life in the head—Christ.

The reality of this future triumphant hierarchy is confirmed for Colet by the increase in spirituality granted to the mundane hierarchies in biblical history. In Colet's view, God's sympathy for mankind has progressively moved mankind closer to true spirituality; from post-lapsarian chaos and night, God led man to the shadowy Hierarchy of the Law, and from these shadows, he has in turn led man into the colorful reality of Christianity. Colet projects this historical progress into a future and perfected hierarchy filled with the dazzling reality of true, divine light. As I have noted earlier, Colet sees two soteriological goals for men: one which leads to the perfected salvation of individual men,
and another which guarantees the fulfillment of the temporal hierarchies in a perfected mystical body.

Unquestionably, Colet's soteriology owes much to the Dionysian hierarchies and their activities of purifying, illuminating and perfecting. On the human level, salvation is achieved insofar as the Christian or Christianity has turned towards true being and abandoned the imperfect, carnal world. Stated in this general manner, the proximity of Colet's soteriology to Platonic transcendence is apparent.

In his Pauline commentaries, however, Colet's soteriology exhibits another important influence: Paul's sense of morality at the practical, everyday level. Apart from the Platonism woven into his theology from Dionysius and other sources, Colet clearly rejects philosophical speculation for its own sake. Philosophy, in itself, is useless unless it can lead men to a higher plane of religious activity. Conversely, as Colet emphasizes in his Convocation Sermon, right action in this world is the primary requirement for the distribution of divine light. Having attained right action, men can turn to the perfecting of themselves and the Christian hierarchy. Salvation, the Church's goal, can only be obtained by a practical morality working in conjunction with the intellect and will. Neoplatonic soteriology functions, then, as a kind of map by which Christianity, acting in a moral manner, charts its future course.

Colet's vision of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is one in which this-worldliness is suppressed so that otherworld-
liness may bear a greater importance among men. Having achieved perfection, man moves out of this world's chaos and into true stability and order. Unfortunately, Colet could find little otherworldly character in his world; instead, as his outbursts at contemporary clergy attest, the perfection which should have been filling the entire human hierarchy had not even been achieved by bishops.

From Dionysius, Colet acquires a characteristic emphasis upon symbolism, a principle of hierarchic diffusion or transmission, and a means of measuring the conditions in the Church of the late 15th century. Concerning this measuring, it is ironic that the writings he viewed as the products of Paul's disciple were actually those of an unknown 5th or 6th century cleric. Nevertheless, while the pseudonymous nature of the Dionysian works makes Colet's conclusions about primitive religious practices questionable, that pseudonymity takes nothing away from the forceful vigor with which Colet seeks an internal purification of the Church and the attainment of the "hierarchy triumphant." And, I believe, it is in large part the intensity with which Colet sets forth his complex but consistent views on these matters that renders his little known works valuable to the 20th century reader.

As I have indicated at the outset, the Dionysian influence upon Colet is pervasive; of all the Dean's works, only the first eleven chapters of the Lectures on Romans exhibit little trace of Dionysian symbolism or transmission. One is as
likely to uncover a trace of the Dionysian transmissive principle in a discussion of Paul's mystical body as to locate the three Pauline virtues embedded in the Dionysian abstracts.

Colet's complex mind continually discovers parallels and similarities among a diversity of Neoplatonist and Christian authors. Rather than a rambling and arbitrary eclecticism, Colet's works demonstrate a consistent, individualized focus which cannot be labelled Pauline or Dionysian, Christian or Platonic. Although Colet presents few "original" ideas, he does exhibit many familiar ideas in an original style and a unique perspective. When all his sources, including Dionysius, have coalesced and filtered through his own world-view, the result is a surprisingly coherent and new understanding of man and his relationship to the divine.
NOTES

1 See EnR, pp. 184-185: "Christus ipse autor naturae pro-
positum habuit in hominibus ipsum naturam exprimere, et ad
naturae ordinem et pulchritudinem quae ad ordine deciderint
redigere, reformareque humanum genus, quod erat morbis et
transgressionibus totum deforme, fedum et detestabile."

2 J. H. Lupton, A Life of Dean Colet (London: Bell, 1887),
Appendix C, p. 299: "The waye where by the churche may be
reformed in to better facion is nat for to make newe lawis."

3 See in particular E. W. Hunt's Dean Colet's Theology
(London: SPCK, 1956), Patrick O'Kelly's introduction to
John Colet's Commentary on I Corinthians, An Edition of the
Latin Text, with Translation, Notes and Introduction (Ph.D.
dissertation: Harvard, 1960), and Leland Miles' John Colet

4 CCH, p. 176: "Quae quid volverunt et quid significar-
unt, illustratus Paulus spiritu Dei probe intellexit. Is
Dionysium interpret a menta divini sermonis in his rebus
edocuit. Ex cujus eruditione et patetactione scripturum,
et ex ipsarum scripturum authoritate, se ipse Dionysius
omnia loqui de celestibus spiritibus profitetur. Paulum
vero apostolum suum magistrum, ducem et praeceptorem vocat
et nominat." Colet here echoes the Acts passage.

5 See Erasmus' account in Declarationes Desiderius

6 The first conclusive articles regarding Dionysius'
spuriousness were Koch's "Die Lehre vom Bosen nach Pseudo-
Stiglmyr's "Der Neuplatoniker Proklus als Verlage des
sogen, Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Ufel," Histor-
isches Jahrbuch im Auftrag der Gorresgesellschaft, 16 (1895):
255-273, 721-748. John Parker, the sole English translator
of the Dionysian works, was the last defender of the Areopa-
gite's authenticity (see Are the Writings of Dionysius the
Areopagite Genuine? [London, 1897]).

7 Ronald Hathaway, Hierarchy and the Definition of Order
in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius (Hague: Nijhoff, 1969),
pp. xxiii, xxiv. For a list of sources, both Christian and
Platonic, in Dionysius, see Rene Roques' introduction in
Maurice de Gandillac's translation, La Hierarchie Celeste
8 For a good discussion of the personalized character of Colet's writing, see O'Kelly, pp. 74-77.


11 Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

12 See Lupton's introductions to De Sacramentis Ecclesiae, pp. 4-7, and Colet's Hierarchies, p. xv: "Colet often leaves his author far behind." Also, see Parsons' "John Colet's Stature as an Exegete," Anglican Theological Review 40 (1958): 36-42.

13 Hunt, pp. 103-130.

14 See O'Kelly, pp. 35-36.

15 Miles, pp. 97-105.


18 See Rolt's introduction to 'The Divine Names' and 'The Mystical Theology' (London: SPCK, 1940), p. 4. Hereafter, references to this introduction and text will be shortened to "Rolt" and the appropriate page number.

19 Rolt, p. 55: "Thus do we learn that It [the Godhead] is the Cause and Origin and Being and Life of all creation;" J. P. Migne, Patrologiae Graecae (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1852, 8197), III, p. 590; "Ὄιον, ὅτι παντὶς νεόντι πατίνα, καὶ ἀρχήν, καὶ οὐσία, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου ..." Hereafter, references to Migne will be abbreviated "P.G." and will all refer to this volume number.

20 Rolt, pp. 61-62; P.G., p. 595.

21 Lupton, p. 200: "... a quo deinde pergit mirifice sapore deitatis dirivato per massam electam, pergetque continuo saue, douec qui salvabuntur omnes oleant deitatem. ..." Rolt, p. 117; P.G., p. 721: "Ὅκ ἀρα ὅ τὸ ἐσχὸν ..."

22 See Rolt, pp. 113-117.

23 Rol t, p. 121; P.G., p. 725: "Εἰ θέλεις ἐκτὸς ἔχοι, οί φύσει χαριῶν, καὶ ἐντεικτοὶ τῶν ἐγγελικῶν ἁγιῶν ..."
For an interesting allegorical anecdote concerning Dionysius' concept of evil, see Hathaway, Letter 8, pp. 149-150.

In his introduction, Rolt, for instance, assumes that the Pseudo-Dionysius was a monk and therefore removed from the realities of secular evil (pp. 22-23). There is, however, no positive or even strongly probable evidence that the Pseudo-Dionysius was a monk. Hathaway provides alternative possibilities for the true Dionysian author (pp. 21-29).

Miles, pp. 89-90; cf. Lupton, EC, p. 196: "Deam, et Christum, et Paulum velle idem etiam omnes homines debere cupere, ut quam maxime possint, sequantur meliora; deteriora, quam maxime possunt, fugiant." Also see LR, p. 6.


Lupton, p. 172: "ne specie pulchriorum rerum capti hebetiores, id ipsum putent Deum esse quod docitas."

Cf. Chapter XV in Colet's and Dionysius' Celestial Hierarchies. Colet, possibly because he doesn't see these concrete names for God as useful, virtually ignores Dionysius' long list of them.

Lupton, p. 183: "Hic sol hominum animos irradians ... simul eos counit in robur, attolit in lucem, arripit in flamam..."

See EC, pp. 57-58.

Lupton, p. 211: "Fuit enim et est quoque Deitas in Christo nostro una, vera, et bona..."

Lupton, LR, p. 168: After the creation of light, "Exorta est e vestigio luculentà rerum omnium ac tocius mundi formacio, quae aut discussit aut textit materiae attritatem." 

For a brief history of this God-Sun analogy, see Miles, pp. 97-98.

Cf. La Hiérarchie Céleste, pp. 168-171, and EnR, p. 70. Also see Lupton, CEH, p. 167: "Rationale autem creaturas, divinae ipsius naturae capaces, mirifica illa irradatio
divini solis apprehendens quasi rarificat et levifactas attolit cursum in se intime, atque attrahit, atque etiam secum unum facit.

37 Hathaway, pp. xxi-xxiii.

38 My translation; see La Hièrarchie Céleste, p. 87:

" şeyarχίας ΧΑΤΙ ἐμὲ τὰ τεῖς έρεα καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ θεοῦς έστὶν ἔφροτον καὶ φομοιομενή καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐνειδομένας αυτὴ.

39 La Hièrarchie Céleste, pp. 87-88: "Σχοπὸς οὖν ἕραρχίας ἐστίν η πρὸς θεόν ἔς ἔφροτον καὶ φομοιομενή τε καὶ ἐνειδομένας αυτὸν.

40 La Hièrarchie Céleste, p. 89.

41 Rolt, pp. 184-185; P.G., p. 977: "Χαθ' ην τα τελεια πάντα τελεσιουργεί καὶ τῆς σιχειας ἐπιστηροὶ τελεσιουργεί.


44 La Hièrarchie Céleste, pp. 105-119; CCH, pp. 20-23.

45 See Rolt, pp. 75-76; La Hièrarchie Céleste, pp. 71, 100, 111; Hathaway, Letter 4, pp. 133-134. All of these passages indicate Christ's dual nature.

46 Roques, in his L'Univers Dionysien, presents a sympathetic study of Dionysius' Christology, but he too is forced to admit that "on peut regretter qu'il ait completement neglige l'element humain de l'Incarnation..." (p. 318).


48 Dionysius claims to have treated the "Supernatural Nature of Christ" in a work, apparently lost, entitled Elements of Divinity (Rolt, p. 76), but there is some doubt that such a work ever existed.

49 Cf. CCH, pp. 17-18, 28-29; EC, p. 125.
That Colet had such a perspective prior to his penning of the Hierarchies treatise is indicated in EnR, pp. 36-37. Sears Jayne, in John Colet and Marsilio Ficino (Oxford: University Press, 1963), establishes that the first half of the Romans lectures was written before this treatise (p. 77).

Lupton, p. 165: "... in his quae dedicimus in eo libro, id vel primum et maximum est, ut quicquid aliunde accepmus boni, id benigniter deinceps impartiamus aliis et communicemus; hoc imitati inestimabilem Dei bonitaten, qui largitur se et ordine communicat universis ... ut deinde, cui datur, ab eodem e vestigio traditur alii, quatenus conveniat. ••"

Lupton, p. 167: "Itaque quod a Deo in angelos promanat, in firmitatem, ordinem et perfectionem eorum, purum simplex et sincerum, id idem pergens in homines in sensus eorum, a puritate et simplicitate sua cadens ••• evaditi aliquatenus sensible."

It is interesting to note that Dionysius also speaks of sensible symbols, but entirely without Colet's distinction between the Mosaic and Christian orders. See John Parker's translation of The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite. (Merrick, Richwood, 1976), II, p. 69. Hereafter, all references to this translation will be indicated by "Parker" and will refer to this volume.

Colet views the activities of angels as sacramental. See SE, p. 35.

See, for example, Roques' L'Univers Dionysien, pp. 53-59.

O'Kelly, p. 126, establishes four worlds in Colet's system—the three mentioned above plus the human world. He qualifies the existence of this latter world in that the human order is incomplete, hence divided, in opposition to the "undivided Universe" of the other worlds. But since Colet's accompanying diagram (EC, p. 128) shows a completed hierarchy of nine human orders, it may be more plausible to conceive of the human hierarchy as a subclass of the sublunary world.

See, for example, LR, p. 18. Although Jayne has placed Letters to Radulphus prior to Colet's treatises on the hierarchies, this passage, as Lupton has noted, bears a striking resemblance to the cosmology described in the Lectures on I Corinthians.

La Hierarchie Celeste, p. 169.


Parker, p. 125; P.G., p. 501: "\(\sum g\), καὶ οὐρανία καὶ νομικὴ χουνωνίας τῇ μεσοτητὶ τῶν ἐρωματώματος, τῇ μὲν χουνωνίας τοῖς νοεραῖς, τῇ δὲ ὅτι καὶ συμβόλους αἰσθητοῖς ποικιλλεῖται." Parker, p. 104; P.G., p. 441.

La Hièrarchie Céleste, p. 133.

Lupton, p. 147: "... admonendo ac praescribendo terminos transgressiones indicavit. Vires, autem, quo quispiam se a transcurru et deliracione contineret, nullas dedit."

Lupton, p. 168: "Sub Moise ea ratio hebreorum et sinagoge fuit, ut illic in plurima umbra medico lux esset. In ecclesia vero Christi hic dum sumus, plurima lux est, sed simul cum ea nonnulla opacitas et umbra; verum tamen sic victa a luce, ut color potium quam nominetur. Color enim constat ex opaco et luce."

P. 126.

Lupton, CEH, p. 170: "... sed ipsum Dei verum vulgum facie ad faciem contueantur..." Lupton correctly notes Colet's echoing of Paul in the expression "facie ad faciem" (I Corinthians 13:12).

For an explanation of Colet's temporal hope-faith-love ordering, see Jayne, pp. 58-68, and Miles, pp. 106-111.

Colet's sense of the term natura is inconsistent, but from his statement that men "fell below nature" (ExR, p. 162), he implies that nature is not inherently evil, a point which is reinforced by his brief indulgence in cosmological speculation in his I Corinthians commentary. This point at least argues against the certainty of Eugene Rice's position in "John Colet and the Annihilation of the Natural" (Harvard Theological Review, 45 [July, 1952]: 141-163).

Cf. EnR, p. 46.

Jayne, p. 72, argues that Colet's sapientia is concerned with the "passive reception of insight by God" rather than intellectual analysis, and he cites Colet's defense of Dionysius' "negative way" (EC, p. 19) for support. Given Colet's cosmological speculation in the I Corinthians commentary, however, Jayne may be hard put to support his view of the Dean's practicality. For a discussion of Dionysius' use of affirmative and negative theology as a synthetic unity,

72 Lupton, p. 183: "Est voluntas in causa eur animus admittis; et est lux simul in causa cur animus velit. Anima calaeus gracia suapte libertate elegit bonum, quod eadem libertate potest recusare."

73 Jayne, pp. 59-73. See La Hiérarchie Céleste, pp. 133-136; Rolt, pp. 128-130.

74 Lupton, p. 194: "ecclesiae anima."

75 Parker, pp. 70-71; P.G., p. 374.

76 Parker, p. 72; P.G., p. 375: "Οὕσιν γὰρ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐραρχίας ἐστὶν τὰ θεοπαράδοτα λόγια."

77 Parker, p. 125; P.G., p. 501: "Τὸ τρισδέκατον ἅμα τελετῶν ἐκείς τελετῶν ἀναλογίως ἐκείς τὰς ἀγίωτας τῶν μυστικῶν ἀναλογίως ἐπεὶ τὰ τελετασμένους."

Roques, in L'Univers Dionysien, p. 175, distinguishes only two triads in the human order, leaving the human hierarchy imperfect. This view, however, is not supported by the passage above which clearly establishes three triads in the ecclesiastical system.

78 Parker, pp. 125-126; P.G., p. 504.

79 Parker, pp. 80-87; P.G., pp. 414-424.

80 Parker, p. 107; P.G., p. 443.

81 Parker, p. 105; P.G., p. 441.

82 Parker, pp. 110-122; P.G., pp. 471-486.

83 For an interesting example of how Colet "Christianizes" Dionysius, compare the Dionysian version of the Hierarch's admonition for the newly baptized initiate (Parker, p. 79: "... the Hierarch ... when he has sealed the man with the ... Muron, pronounces him to be henceforward partaker of the most divinely initiating Eucharist") to Colet's (CEH, p. 68: "The Bishop then again signs him with ointment ... in order that, being now in the mystical body, he may daily go forth towards Christ ... ").

84 Parker, pp. 124-125; P.G., p. 501: "Τελευμένοι δὲ οἱ προσ τῶν νεμέλων εὐμελείας ἀναλογίως ἐπετελεῖτε ἐν τῷ μονεῖν ἀνυψώμενον."


85 Parker, pp. 128-130; P.G., pp. 505-507.
86 Parker, pp. 132-134; P.G., pp. 509-513.
87 Cf. CEH, p. 69.
88 Parker, p. 135; P.G., pp. 512-513.
89 Cf. MB, p. 38.
90 Lupton, p. 248: "Sed, proh dolor, fumus et caligo tetra ex valle hominum tenebrosorum tanta jam dudum et tam spissa spiravit sursum, ut civitatis lumen fere abruit; ut nunc ecclesiastici homines, involuti tenebris . . . stulti commiscuerunt et confunderunt . . . , ut nunc rursus in mundo nihil sit, quam homina turba, confusius."
91 Lupton, p. 63: Christ, "qui assumpsit sibi ecclesiam in uxorém. . . ."
92 Lupton, p. 73: "... habeamus matrimonium et sacerdotium in Christo omnino esse idem . . . ."
93 Lupton, p. 66: "... non est significatio, sed ipsa veritas. . . ."
94 Parker, pp. 95-100, 138; P.G., pp. 432-436; 529, 532.
95 Parker, pp. 139-140; P.G., pp. 532-533.
96 Lupton, p. 249: "Ecclesia Dei quae supra mundum in monte Dei sita est, in liquido aere et spiritua luculento, suppeditatem sibi et sua felicitatis materiem habet ex valle miseriae hujus mundi; quae inferiori sua parte virili et activa, superiorem et magis passivam mundi partem, non aliter Ferme atque solis radii summam aquae partes, suo calore eas extenuas et rarificiens, attollit in altum, ut ex ea primum construat sibi quasi corpus, quod ipsum, quamquam spiritualiori parte ecclesiae crassius est et corpulentius, tamen est toto mundano corpore spiritualius. Ex que corpore deinde, et crassiare ecclesiae parte, sana et integro . . . maturiores . . . trahantur in racionem spiritalem; ut jam activae sint partes et spiritus sint."
97 See Colet's note concerning Ficino's philosophical interests, Jayne, p. 72: "the road to wisdom is good actions and justice." Cf. EC, p. 61.
98 See, for example, Lupton's Life of Dean Colet, Appendix C, p. 302: "... if you [the bishops] kepe the lawes, and if you reforme fyrst your lyfe to the rules of the Canon lawes, then shall ye gyve vs lyght. . . ."
Although Jayne's order of Colet's works (p. 76) places two other works prior to Colet's Hierarchies, the descriptions of light, the Godhead and evil (LR, p. 6) and the transmissive principle of "spiritual irradiation" (EnR, p. 77) suggest at least some acquaintance with the Dionysian system.
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