INTRODUCTION

CONTEXTS OF COLET AND DIONYSIUS

Daniel T. Lochman

Need for a New Edition

The first printed edition of Colet’s work on Dionysius's Ecclesiastical Hierarchy appeared in 1867, when the Victorian authority on early sixteenth century English writers, J.H. Lupton, writing in the wake of the influential Frederic Seebohm and the introduction of the idea of “Oxford Reformers,” followed his 1867 publication in Latin only of Colet's A Treatise on the Sacraments of the Church (De sacramentis ecclesiae) with an English translation and Latin text of what he called Colet's “treatises” on the Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies. A remarkably able, learned, and productive scholar given limited access to libraries and research tools, Lupton relied for his transcript on the only version known to him, the one housed to this day at St. Paul's School (Lupton, Two Treatises xiv). Lupton speculated that the St. Paul's manuscript of the commentaries on the Hierarchies was one among those writings “in parchement” Colet bequeathed in his will of 22 August 1519 (xiii) but apparently did not know of a separate manuscript of the Dionysian commentaries, the copy-text for the present edition now housed in the British Library. J.B. Trapp's 1976 census of Colet-related materials

---

1 J.B. Trapp, “John Colet, His Manuscripts and the Pseudo-Dionysius” describes the St. Paul's MS as a “later transcript on paper” of the British Library MS. It includes the same headings but not the marginal annotations in the still unknown, so-called “red-annotating hand”: “It was presented to the school in 1759 by a pupil, Robert Emmot, and bears the signature of Peter Fanwood, probably from the end of the sixteenth century” (215–216; see also Lupton’s 1876 census of Colet MSS in Opuscula quaedam theologica, Appendix, 311, Number 17). Trapp correctly notes the defective state of the St. Paul's School MS, which lacks three leaves. For his edition, Lupton turned to the paper Cambridge University Library copy of the Celestial Hierarchy as the source for two missing leaves but, lacking another witness for the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, merely noted the omission in a footnote (218, CEH 1.198). Although the British Library MS (formerly known as the Duke of Leeds MS) could have been known to Lupton before or after its first mention in the 1888 Report of Historical Manuscripts
identified two additional contemporary manuscripts of the commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. One, MS Gg.iv.26 at Cambridge University Library, has corrections, additions, and annotations in Colet’s hand, and the other contains also the treatise on the sacraments (*De sacramentis ecclesiae*) and the commentary on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. This latter manuscript, now known as British Library Add. 63853, is in the hand of the scribe Colet and Erasmus often employed, the “one-eyed” Peter Meghen of Bois-le-Duc in Brabant. Its provenance includes ownership by William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–1598), with his garter arms granted in 1574 stamped on the sixteenth-century, leather-over-boards binding. At some later point, the manuscript came into the possession of the House of Leeds, whence it was transferred to the British Library as Loan 55(2) prior to receiving its present access number at the close of the twentieth century.\(^2\) The manuscript certainly dates from Colet’s lifetime since it bears corrections in his hand (through folio i4\(^r\)) and it includes a folio leaf lacking in the St. Paul’s School MS (c4; e2\(^r\)–e4\(^v\) in the British Library MS). The British Library MS contains numerous substantive and non-substantive variants from both the St. Paul’s School MS and Lupton’s edition. A generally careful editor and translator, Lupton sometimes silently introduced variants not found in either MS, and his attention to orthography and mechanics occasionally flagged.

During a conversation at the Courtauld Institute in London in 2004, the late J.B. Trapp praised the Victorian cadences of Lupton’s translation of Colet’s stylized Neo-Latin; this translation has been of great value to the present editor and translator. Lupton’s editions do not, of course, take into account the linguistic, historical, and cultural scholarship of the subsequent 150 years. Lupton’s transcriptions and translations are sometimes inaccurate or questionable, and, though Lupton’s periods often rise to near-scriptural dignity and grace, they are sometimes difficult to follow (due in large part to the occasional complexity and extent of Colet’s balanced periods, some including elliptical structures seemingly designed to convey rhetorical intensity). Although Lupton’s editions of Colet’s works are in the public domain and may be found on the web and in print facsimiles,