

John Colet: Convocation Sermon, 1512

“You are come together today, fathers and right wisemen, to hold a council. In which what you will do and what matters you will handle, I do not yet know, but I wish that, at length, mindful of your name and profession, you would consider of the reformation of ecclesiastical affairs; for never was there more necessity and never did the state of the Church more need endeavors. For the Church—the spouse of Christ—which He wished to be without spot or wrinkle, is become foul and deformed. As saith Isaias, "The faithful city is become a harlot"; and as Jeremias speaks, "She hath committed fornication with many lover," whereby she has conceived many seeds of iniquity and daily bringeth forth the foulest offspring. Wherefore I have come here today, fathers, to admonish you with all your minds to deliberate, in this your Council, concerning the reformation of the Church.”

“... nothing has so disfigured the face of the Church as the secular and worldly way of living on the part of the clergy ...”

“... four evils—viz., in devilish pride, in carnal concupiscence, in worldly covetousness, and in worldly occupations ...”

“... by which, as I have said, we are conformed to this world, by which the face of the Church is marred, by which her influence is destroyed, plainly, far more than it was destroyed and marred, either at the beginning by the persecution of tyrants, or after that by the invasion of heresies which followed.”

“The diseases which are now in the Church were the same in former ages, and there is no evil for which the holy Fathers did not provide excellent remedies; there are no crimes in prohibition of which there are not laws in the body of Canon Law. The need, therefore, is not for the enactment of new laws and constitutions, but for the observance of those already enacted.”

“The clerical and priestly part of the Church being thus reformed, we can then proceed with better grace to the reformation of the lay part, which indeed it will be very easy to do, if we ourselves have been reformed first.”