

# [Impact of humanist reform on education and politics in sixteenth century britain](https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-humanist-reform-on-education-and-politics-in-sixteenth-century-britain/)

Topic and questions

The proposed topic for this project will be the analysis of Humanist reform in relation to education and politics in sixteenth century Britain.  More specifically, the analysis will focus on changes brought about in Britain throughout Henry VIII’s reign, from his ascension in 1509 to his death in 1547.  The paper will examine the close relationships of what I perceive to be key influential figures in English Humanism and how their actions and beliefs may have established the groundworks for educational and political reform in Tudor England.

The analysis of primary and secondary sources will demonstrate the Humanist thought process shared by three individuals.  It will shed light on their individual achievements, their influence on English society and what sources or experiences affected their way of thinking.  Analysis will also attempt to establish the nature of their interactions with each other and what they wanted to achieve as a result of working together.  The research will focus on three main figures of Humanism in England and abroad; Desiderius Erasmus, John Colet and Sir Thomas More.

It is hoped that by examining these avenues, the research will give clear and concise answers to the following set of questions.  Was the spread of Humanism throughout England during the reign of Henry VIII in part due to these three gentlemen? If so, was it helped by their high academic status or due to their political affiliations? Were they responsible for changes in the way education was perceived by the population?  Did they play a key role in educational and political reform ideas throughout Britain in the early to mid-sixteenth century?  If so, was it intentional?

The political and educational reforms of Tudor England are both well documented areas of history.  These three men are often mentioned and cited in research or discussions about the rise of Humanism in England.  I think it would be interesting for research to shift the focus from what they accomplished to the less known side of why they set out to reach these goals.  It will also be important to establish if these men were aware of their roles in changing the natural order of English government and education or if it was their ideals that grew into something bigger than they could have planned.

Background

Desiderius Erasmus, John Colet and Sir Thomas More are prominent figures in the spread of Humanistic ideals throughout the sixteenth century.  All three of these men became friends and wrote to each other sharing their political, educational and reformist ideas.[1]It is common for each of these Humanists to be studied based on what they believed and achieved historically.  The mention of a circle of friendship between peers who believe in Humanist ideas is rarely evaluated as more than just that.  However, in Thomas More’s letter to John Colet in 1504, the reader get’s a glimpse inside the strength of the friendship that is often overlooked.  More writes “ Following your guidance, I had escaped almost from the jaws of hell”,[2]demonstrating a moral support system exists between them.  A basis for a closer friendship than what is usually presented is a perspective the research proposed will try to evaluate.  Erasmus, although not English, visited England four times in his life and struck up a friendship with More and Colet.[3]His conversations with a multitude of Humanists across Europe can help shed light on the questions this paper will address.  An example of such correspondence would be between he and Henry Bullock in 1516 where Erasmus paints a clear picture of the state of resistance for educational reform in England.[4]All three men, of similar academic standing exchanged letters and ideas which now make up the basis of English Humanism.

Historiography

One of the most recent articles written on John Colet was in 2003 by Jonathan Arnold.  In its review by John Alexander Guy, it is emphasized that Colet was greatly influenced by Erasmus in terms of religious reformation ideals.[5]Although historical evidence paints Colet as a reformer, Arnold challenges this view by stating that through his research, he has found Colet to have been a failure and of limited influence in English Humanism.[6]In 2014, Daniel Nodes argued that there was a sharp contrast between Thomas More and John Colet.  Marking Colet as a pre-protestant Protestant and anti-Christian, noting a true hatred for relics and praying to saints.[7]The contrasting views of these authors will be useful in researching Colet and attempting to formulate an opinion of his influence and career.

Thomas More is widely viewed as a political reformer in Tudor England due to his proximity to Henry VIII and his background as a lawyer.[8]A recent article from 2014 depicted More’s important role in political legislation by comparing ideas found in More’s book Utopia , to the Draft Poor Law of 1535 and enacted statute of 1536.  The author highlighted similarities in Christian humanist thought process in reform perspective and the statute which More helped draft.[9]Another article about More’s importance as a political reformer depicts him as a hero in a variety of political spectrums.  He is hailed as one of the most important political theologians to have ever lived by the author.[10]Although evidently biased, it is a good source to demonstrate Sir Thomas More’s impact on the political reform in Tudor England.

Erasmus has much written about him by historians, but the research proposed will disregard most if not all of it.  This research paper will focus on his correspondences with the above-mentioned Humanists as well as with other important figures of the time.  His letters will be used to support the arguments made in the paper’s analysis regarding the effect of Humanism in British educational and political reform as well as the men responsible for it.

Approach, Feasibility and Significance

The research proposed will deal with primary and secondary sources pulled from online databases as well as books.  Compilations of primary source documents will also be examined either in print form or online in the event the print versions are not accessible.

Volumes of research has been done on each of these men independently.  The issue with most of the research is that besides a few articles from the last twenty years, most research was conducted and published between 1890 and 1960.  This may cause a lack of recent evidence but the primary sources surrounding this topic more than make up for it.  The only issue being that from my initial research, some of these sources will have to be translated from Latin or Spanish.  This could alter the true meaning of sources and will be avoided as much as possible through the course of the project.  Another issue affecting the feasibility of this research is its dependence on a few very expensive books which are either not at the library or have been “ at binding” for an undetermined amount of time.  This may cause my research to have to settle on a second-rate primary source, downgrading the quality of the research a touch.

As mentioned earlier, many historians have researched the lives of the three men.  Erasmus has been regarded as an influential Humanist figure since the beginning of Humanism itself.  Colet has been proven to have believed strongly in church reform in Tudor England.  Although the level of influence he had on reform has been up for debate recently, there is no doubt he needs to be included in this paper when discussing educational reform.  Thomas More’s contribution to politics in sixteenth century Britain is undeniable.  Aside from a select few, no works published so far have answered the questions I have put forth in this proposal in a single document.  What I propose would be beneficial to the community as a document encompassing the relationship these men shared, the influences they had on each other as well as the effects their relationships inadvertently had on British political and educational history.  It is my hopes that the research will also shed light on whether they were voluntarily challenging society with reform ideals or if it just happened to be the case due to their personal convictions and superior academic training.

Bibliography

* Bridgett, Thomas Edward. Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More: Lord Chancellor of England and Martyr Under Henry VIII . London: Burns, 1891.
* Brodie, Nicholas Dean. “ Reassessing 27 Henry VIII, c. 25 and Tudor Welfare: Changes and Continuities in Context.” Parergon 31, no. 1, (2014): 111-136. https://muse. jhu. edu/ (accessed February 17, 2019).
* Caspari, Fritz. Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England . New York: Teachers College Press, 1968.
* Gushurst-Moore, André. “ A Man for All Eras: Recent Books on Thomas More.” Political Science Reviewer 33 (July 2004): 90–143: http://0-search. ebscohost. com. mercury. concordia. ca/login. aspx? direct= true&db= a9h&AN= 14326498&site= eds-live . (accessed February 22, 2019)
* Guy, J A (John Alexander). “ Dean John Colet of St Paul’s: Humanism and Reform in Early Tudor England.” The Journal of Ecclesiastical History 60, no. 4 (October 2009): 811–12. doi: 10. 1017/S0022046909990091. (accessed February 15, 2019).
* House, Seymour Baker. “ More, Sir Thomas [St Thomas More] (1478–1535), lord chancellor, humanist, and martyr.” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. (2008): http://0-www. oxforddnb. com. mercury. concordia. ca/view/10. 1093/ref: odnb/9780198614128. 001. 0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19191. (accessed February 15, 2019).
* McConica, James. “ Erasmus, Desiderius (c. 1467–1536), humanist scholar and reformer.” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. (2007): http://0-www. oxforddnb. com. mercury. concordia. ca/view/10. 1093/ref: odnb/9780198614128. 001. 0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-39358. (accessed February 17, 2019).
* Nodes, Daniel J. “ Personal, Societal, and Literary Reform in John Colet’s Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.” Church History 83, no. 3 (September 2014): 547–70. doi: 10. 1017/S0009640714000547. (accessed February 15, 2019).
* Rotterdam, Erasmus Of. “ On the New Testament.” In The Portable Renaissance Reader , edited by James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, 401- 408.  New York, NY: Penguin Classics 1977.

[1]Fritz Caspari, Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England , (New York, NY: Teachers College Press 1968). 49.

[2]Thomas Edward Bridgett, Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More: Lord Chancellor of England and Martyr Under Henry VIII , (London: Burns 1891). 46-48.

[3]James McConica, “ Erasmus, Desiderius (c. 1467–1536), humanist scholar and reformer,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://0-www. oxforddnb. com. mercury. concordia. ca/view/10. 1093/ref: odnb/9780198614128. 001. 0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-39358.

[4]Erasmus Of Rotterdam, “ On the New Testament,” In The Portable Renaissance Reader , ed. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, (New York, NY: Penguin Classics 1977). 401.

[5]John Alexander Guy, “ Dean John Colet of St Paul’s: Humanism and Reform in Early Tudor England,” The Journal of Ecclesiastical History 60, no. 4 (October 2009). 811. doi: 10. 1017/S0022046909990091.

[6]Ibid., 812.

[7]Daniel J. Nodes, “ Personal, Societal, and Literary Reform in John Colet’s Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,” Church History 83, no. 3 (September 2014). 548. doi: 10. 1017/S0009640714000547.

[8]Seymour Baker House, “ More, Sir Thomas [St Thomas More] (1478–1535), lord chancellor, humanist, and martyr,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, http://0-www. oxforddnb. com. mercury. concordia. ca/view/10. 1093/ref: odnb/9780198614128. 001. 0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19191.

[9]Nicholas Dean Brodie, “ Reassessing 27 Henry VIII, c. 25 and Tudor Welfare: Changes and Continuities in Context,” Parergon 31, no. 1 (2014). 113. https://muse. jhu. edu/

[10]André Gushurst-Moore, “ A Man for All Eras: Recent Books on Thomas More,” Political Science Reviewer 33 (July 2004). 91. http://0-search. ebscohost. com. mercury. concordia. ca/login. aspx? direct= true&db= a9h&AN= 14326498&site= eds-live.