

This video challenges the traditional view of monasteries, particularly in the British Isles, as being disengaged and hostile to the intellectual currents and reforms of the late Middle Ages and the European Reformation. This perspective has been prevalent since the Reformation, where radical Protestant theologians portrayed monasticism as reactionary and opposed to new ideas. However, the author argues that this view is based on misconceptions and a lack of thorough examination of historical evidence.

The author emphasizes the need for a closer investigation of monastic records, many of which remain unpublished and inaccessible. Through their research, they found that monks in the early 15th century were actively engaging with humanist ideas, studying classical texts, and re-evaluating their own practices in light of these influences. Rather than being resistant to change, monastic writers demonstrated an eagerness to adapt and innovate within their traditions.

In particular, the author highlights how monastic communities began to embrace humanist ideals by changing their educational approaches and integrating a more worldly view into their writings and practices. They made significant contributions to universities like Oxford and Cambridge, embodying a humanist spirit and demonstrating that they were not merely passive institutions but active participants in the intellectual developments of their time.

The overarching conclusion is that many assumptions about monasticism's rigidity and resistance to reform should be reassessed, as the evidence suggests a much more dynamic and reform-minded reality during this critical historical period. The author advocates for further exploration of manuscript materials to deepen the understanding of this era and overturn longstanding misconceptions.