

## More's Principles of Individuality Versus Authority: Robert Bolt's "A Man for All Seasons"

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### Abstract

The dramatic view of the death of Sir Thomas More in Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* shows a severe challenge of martyrdom. Martyrdom is to die for noble religious, political or other principles. More's personal life is marvelous example of integrity and faithfulness. This paper is going to examine his devotion to his religion and God, and his full readiness for sacrificing his life for this excellent value. At the same time, it is a study of More's adherence to social justice and loyalty and the nation. The very traits of his character are more interesting to be provided as admired by us today.

*A Man for All Seasons* aims to criticize in accordance with religion. It is considered admirable as it treats the theme of a man being victimized by the wills of a tyrant King chasing his wishes far from the right laws. In his historical plays, Robert Bolt pays great attention to the community and political issues of his country. Bolt presented drama with their genuine purposes at a time when he dedicated more of his plays to be didactic having ethical goals and design. In some of his plays he planned to capture the mind of his readers to the authentic social affairs and to show the ill-conduct of the whole misuse of ethics in community as David Krasner comments saying:

Shaw conceived of drama and theatre as a moral institution, akin to the Church in its significance. Drama, he believed, should provoke thought, prompt one's conscience, elucidate social behavior, fight despair, resist dullness, and serve as a holy temple for the ascendancy of humanity.

(Krasner, 2012: 182)

The everlasting struggle between good and evil, individuals and power has been extremely pointed out in literature in general and social and moral drama in particular. Within one society two possible groups existed, people of power who represent the higher authority and who have no heed to principles and integrity over the personal interests which they claim as the social interests, exploiting higher

positions and on the other hand a group which is committed to the values which are the guide for well-arranged life behavior within the body of religious and social principles. The latter group believes in their communal conduct as part of Christianity as they have been reared. The disagreement of power versus values is the prevalent theme in Bolt's "*A Man for All Seasons*". He utilizes a real historical events, issues and characters to exhibit the essence of the contest in the of moral Christian ity that carries moral goals to be an example. The current theme that occurs through the play is the "drama of the threatened self" in which a protagonist has to determine either to follow up his own integrity or to succumb to the desire of the community. In fact, there is a distinction between how the human being should imagine conscience and what it means to devout individuals. The most significant difference seems to be, the pious persons must listen to how their conscience instruct them to obey God rather than man.

**More** I am used to hear bad men misuse the name of God, yet God exists. (*Turning back.*) In matters of conscience, the loyal subject is more bounden to be loyal to his conscience than to any other thing.

(Bolt. Act II )

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Conscience therefore, is considered as God's will, and then in case of disobedience it would be against God. As a true Christian and a man who has to protect himself, More is resolved to following what his conscience instructs him. Hence following the social demands would make man suffer earthly curse and physical inaction, unending pangs of remorse and dooming soul to immortal conviction.

As the play is based on historical real characters and events, it casts light on the life of Sir. Thomas More and the case of divorce of King Henry VIII with his wife Catherine of Aragon who failed to beget him an heir to the throne of England. "*A Man for All Seasons*" again has a deep root in *Utopia* by More which led to a constant dispute fascinated a multitude of writers and scholars since its writing up to the present time:

Thomas More has inspired writers and artists of all kinds. Through his writings, letters and early biography, much is known about him.....As stated, scholars still debate whether the *Utopia* should be read literally or ironically. While some argue he was a malicious, inherently evil and bad-tempered man, others literally made a saint out of him

(Bert Verwoerd, n.d: 3 )

In his fascinating preface Bolt refers to the historical background of the play deeply, it is the time of Renaissance (16th-century of England) that witnesses the Reformation movement, a period with one Catholic Church (the only Christian Church) the only religious institution that people were following to demand reform.

The plot of the play rests on the historical social incident which leads consequently to Sir Thomas More's death , who was the Chancellor, More refuses King Henry VIII's demand to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn. The course of the events presents the strong belief of More in Christian religious and social stands principle, to whom people showed more admiration and love.

Sir Thomas More has appeared as a literary character in many diverse works from the time of his death to the twentieth century; these works have generally treated him as a model of intellectual integrity and adamant conscience whose love of truth has made him the perfect touchstone against which a panoply of other individuals may be judged.  
( Toups,1960: IV)

Thomas More defends his conscience until his last breath. It is really crucial to comprehend the principle he was loyal to, as he accepted death as worthy as freedom of conscience. This means, he is aware that conscience is the ultimate voice, which leads to the perfection of human soul and gives way to the world of heavenly justice. More considers conscience as the place of making decision, its goodness as how the right values have been set in the right way in a specific matter. Human brain effort is the stage for hosting the decision. This what (Fr. Juan Vélez 2009: 122) confirms in his "Freedom of Conscience in Ethical Decision Making, The Linacre Quarterly "The moral conscience is considered the proximate norm of conduct because it is the immediate source of information guiding human actions." (Vélez 2009)

None is sure of whether his judgment is as worthy as the freedom of right ethics choice. In modern minds assessment this ethical judgment stems from "Protestant sensibility an anxiety - a "fear and trembling," to recall Kierkegaard's echo of St. Paul - about our fate once we are dead" (Fuller. 2017). In More's case this anxiety is not essential, thus he prefers death instead. As a result of this he identifies uncertain conscience may lead to transgression of religious traditions represented by the church which stands for God will. " As regards a doubtful conscience one may never act, otherwise one would expose oneself to the violation of God's will " (Fuller. 2017).

In this world, values of goodness of welfare norms in most cases go against worldly power and people of high authority. The main point of struggle in the play is that between More and King Henry VIII. In Bolt's play, More represents religious civil law, man's prudence and social orderly life. Religion gives him the full assurance of God service which is for granted not to insult any higher positions rather to support worldly order and law as he stated:" The service of God is not a dishonor to any office..... Believe me, my friend, I do not belittle the honour His Majesty is doing me"( Bolt Act I :34). More is of the belief that Godly law dominates man's life, which is hidden and sometimes could not be realized by the human. Despite, he represents church law, More admitted his limit of power as individual stating that:

"I'm Not God. The currents and eddies of right and wrong, which you find such plainsailing, I can't navigate, I'm no voyager. But in the thickets of the law, oh there I'm a forester. I doubt if there's a man alive who could follow me there, thank God. ..."

(Bolt Act I :50)

King Henry VIII's stands for the royal authority of England and royalty, the keeper of the dynasty of the kingdom on the other hand, and is worried about one thing, is how to has a legitimate son and heir to the throne for keeping this dynasty subsist. A new Act of Succession is enacted by the king and in this Act of Supremacy, Henry VIII proclaimed himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. Thomas More, the bishop of Rochester, who was a man of principle, as a person who will not sacrifice his doctrines refused taking an oath. He is forced by his idealism to accept execution rather to sacrifice his beliefs. This how Robert Bolt describes him as a man "adamantine senses of his own self" (Bolt xii). More takes advantage of a firmly established and widely shared agreement in regard to social, religious doctrines and power.

As More is a man of good Christian religious principles, his sophistication is that since the world creation civil law has been well settled; therefore, man can behave in line with his conscience. This belief made him think that man is protected by law from being the victim of misuse of power. Both civil law and religion are enacted to be with aims for arranging man's conduct in life. Then More confirms his faith when he tells Roper the law he believes in "The law, Rober, the law. I know what's legal not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal"(Bolt. Act I :49). More as shown was sincere and faithful to his socio-religious post as well as his country, and he is certain that the disagreement with the King who he engaged in is for good reasons and for the sake of his own percepts. More insistence of refusing the King's quest shows his religious opinion as strongly trusts God and his sacred tenet. It is clear that More as man of good individual belief and religious Christian doctrine is divided between his social, religious and as Chancellor from the on hand and his loyalty to the King from the other hand. Being an orthodox Catholic and for him an oath was something perfectly specific; it was an invitation to God, an invitation God would not refuse, to act as a witness, and to judge"(Bolt. VI ) More has astonishing social and religious resolution , he is a man who has a splendid energy for life, a man with a unique merit, void of these qualities his life is worthless. The good religious quality that grants More this solid ground is sounded through the play, it is clear in Chapuys speech "Sir Thomas is a good son of the Church" (Bolt. Act I :29 ) and More himself confirms the notion of being good with great duty towards his nation saying that:

"Well .... I believe, when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duties ... they lead their country by a short route to chaos ... And we shall have my prayers to fall back on"  
(Bolt. Act I :16 )

More is aware of his principles and law and is sure of what to do, he thinks God's laws and his little knowledge leads him to the right judgment of matters legally not according to his common sense.

**More** That's very neat. But look now ... If we lived in a State where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us good, and greed would make us saintly. And we'd live like animals or angels in the happy land that *needs* no heroes. But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice and thought, and have to choose, to be human at all ... why then perhaps we *must* stand fast a little – even at the risk of being heroes.

( Bolt. Act II: 108)

A deep investigation to the thoughts of More, one has to know that he has a great belief in his society as well as a larger unit the laws of religion work through. He strives to keep the norms of traditions and the good Christian criterion, for him man has to judge himself within his community. This idea is well stated in Bolt's preface to the play saying " Hence our willingness to locate ourselves from something that is certainly larger than ourselves, the society that contains us" (Bolt .IV). But, at the same time as man of logic, More's loyalty to his ideal Christian religion puts law and society as inseparable again this what Bolt states in his preface to the play:

If 'society' is the name we give to human behaviour when it is patterned and orderly, then the Law ....is the very pattern of society. More's trust in the law was his trust in his society"

(Bolt :VIII)

For More the English society is part of a larger unit, the religious one established by Christ, it is the church. The rule of the church expands from ancient to the farther future, where the law is the model of society. His insistence to stay within the limits of society is the law which is the last hope of More. More is seen stuck between individual ethics needs and communal matters, spiritual loyalty and pressures of power, social necessity and individual freedom. Despite, Bolt displays More as a man who would fight to protect his faith, the play exhibits that it is an issue of conscience rather than religion. However, on many occasions More reflects his absolute faith in religion, for this he is resolved to keep his decision not to take an oath at a time he knew well the consequence of his stand is death which means for him martyrdom, he sates this in Act II addressing his daughter saying:

"Listen, Meg. God made the angels to show Him splendour..... But man He made to serve him wittily in the tangle of his mind ... But it's God's part, not our own, to bring ourselves to that extremity! Our natural business lies in escaping "

( Act II :96 )

More is of an endless devotion to religion that goes against Henry's demand to obey his acts, but he is a man shown in the play confident that God is ultimate judge with power. This is a sheer point as how much he has faith in the authority of God and the agreement between transient, worldly desires and spiritual demands of human life. Similarly, More is aware that his refusal is accurate to the heart of his faith and martyrdom should be a result of his good conscience but not his temporal choice. Thus, his submission to his faith must keep him within God will. More's insistence on his religious obedience is what prohibits him of being a follower to man's law, in the course of the play More is seen as man with firm stand and no room for danger the matter which makes him seem very committed to his faith leaving behind the temporal life. This sense is stressed by Noel Joseph Toups in his "Sir Thomas More, Humanist and Hero: a Man for All Ages 1980 saying:

Instead, Mr. Spectator praises More's wit and learning, echoing Erasmus, Roper, and earlier More biographers, and notes that he died a martyr upon a point of religion. But even in death his wit did not abandon him: (239)

Bolt presents More as a devout figure who stands firm to keep the traditions of his belief pure and More is a person of great respect to his religion. For him religion is sacred, man should take heed of his deeds which have to be in line with the heavenly laws even in case they go against man's law. More conveys this in his talk to Norfolk saying " You and your class have 'given in' as you rightly call it – because the religion of this country means nothing to you one way or the other" (Bolt. Act II :94). Christian principles according to More as has been shown by Bolt as the source of everlasting life. Some see that the play is a representation of conscience and not of religion. To some extent this is true. In the mind of More, conscience is essence of the belief in God and religion, one to be man of religion means man of conscience. Bolt never misses the chance to reveal this concept More says to Norfolk:

And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience, and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?

(Act II :101)

This notion is the right conduct of life as keeping faith and discriminating of what is right of what is not is good conscience; more to the point conscience is the outcome of God's religion. In this respect of following conscience leads to heaven, and heaven is the reward of pious people of good religious beliefs. As a consequence of this one has to consider conscience and religion inseparable; integrity and right doctrine are the fruits of God's law represented by the role of religion. Noticing the entire life of More, it is clear that he was directed by his good moral, proper, and religious worth.

More's entire life is an example of personal and professional conscience, integrity and excellence. More's story represents a lifelong commitment to social justice, service, and devotion to God.

(Miles .2014 : 423)

Due to his profound devotion to spiritual principles, his refusal was the result of his belief in which the king's case of divorce is not well with his religion. "the fact that he believed the king's divorce and marriage both went against Roman Catholic law"(Crompton. 2006 :100).

Always man believes in religion as the guidance which regulates human life. Thus, religion is a set of spiritual laws to organize human life. Law and religion are twins, it is believed that they are inseparable, social matters and religious issues that show the heart of life in More's time, therefore his behavior in regard to law was the same of his view towards church as he assumes there is no difference between them at any rate. But, since the creation of man and when man starts to establish his own roles, it is noticed that man's laws are not that of God, this is the very reason led to corruption at various levels. In the same sense, More confirms this in the play at the moment of discussion with Will Roper. Reacting to More's words regarding "cut down every law in England to [get to the Devil]" ( Bolt. Act I :50) More says:

This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—man's laws, not God's —and if you cut them down – and you're just the man to do it – d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (*Quietly.*) Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake.

(Bolt. Act I : 50).

But for him religious organization of laws is still the same never changed. Therefore, More never gives up his faith towards the laws of heaven which he is sure will take him to the right path and eventual rest. He is still trying to find a loophole to save himself out of the dilemma of his doctrine. In the course of the events, More realizes it is hard to come to a compromise believing between the two unequal laws, More has a pure Christian faith that makes him anchor to find himself a way out, and law is the sole comfort saying to Alice "it's a point of law! Accept it from me, Alice, that in silence is my safety under the law, but my silence must be absolute, it must extend to you." (Bolt. Act II :74). The protagonist finds shelter in law which is something crucial to him. More vast vocation as a professional and talented lawyer believes that neither voting whether right or wrong the case of divorce is nor taking the oath legally saves his life and at the meantime is not a violation to the Roman church laws which he believes in, thus More confirms this saying:

The law is not a 'light' for you or any man to see by; the law is not an instrument of any kind.... The law is a causeway upon which so long as he

keeps to it a citizen may walk safely. (*Earnestly addressing him.*) In matters of conscience.

( Bolt. Act II.

118-19)

The portrayal of More is in contrast to the law of King Henry which has been presented as dictatorial and stems from the King's wishes, who seems very violent in his actions and speech.

More saw as the unjust manipulation of England's fundamental laws and institutions, that Henry VIII and Cromwell had to use the full force of their positions to silence through imprisonment and then execution one of London's most popular citizens and one of Europe's most respected authors.

(Wegemer and Smith

.2004:XXX)

The King, on the other hand, is looking for tyrannical power to dominate both spiritual religions and the world of the politics as well " Henry VIII, who started with everything and squandered it all, who had the physical and mental fortitude to endure a lifetime of gratified greeds"( Bolt. I ). His wishes and wills are his ultimate motifs and no position for sound reason. He admits this sense at the time of claiming his ownership to people and land as well when he said" There's the road for me, the river; my river" (Bolt. Act I :36), and portrays his as "the monstrous baby"(Bolt : I) in the preface. The King is seen as a mark of absolute power and this fact is evident through the behavior of servants whom their ultimate wishes are to fulfill the king's desires. As a historical play, for swift history is a show of different types of personals, thus Bolt successfully compares the two characters philosophically. Henry is shown as tyrannically dictator, self-servant, ready to forsake his conscience for private interest and evidently this fact proved to be true at a time the church of England was separated from the Church of Rome for the sake of his selfishness. Power becomes the vital weapon to punish and kill anyone goes against his wishes.

Henry essentially insists on unlimited rule without restraint. As he is the king Henry named himself the supreme head of the Church of England and kills whomever opposite him. Decisions are not taken on the bases of right sense or logic but according to his lusts and power thirst.

**Henry** No opposition I say! No opposition! Your conscience is your own affair; but you are my Chancellor! There, you have my word – I'll leave you out of it. But I don't take it kindly, Thomas, and I'll have no opposition! I see how it will be; the Bishops will oppose me. The full-fed, hypocritical 'Princes of the *Church*'! Ha! As for the Pope! – Am I to burn in Hell because the Bishop of Rome with the Emperor's knife to his throat, mouths me Deuteronomy? Hypocrites! They're all hypocrites!

(Bolt. Act I: 42)

More indicates a position of the civil rights, in opposition to Henry who rules by orthodox authority rather than by law. It is evident that both of them adopt the priority of logic which is an integral part of human renaissance, despite that More is accused by Roper: "the law's your god" ( Bolt. Act I :50). The theme of anti-authoritarian is well established in the play; therefore, King Henry is described as a person of unlimited desire for power. At the same time the King hands over power to some of his officials like Cromwell and Wolsey who in their part fulfill his wishes and at the mean time he aggressively deals with them in case of not achieving his needs. Those officials along with the king are evil, unfaithful, full of illegal desires, committed to bribe, hypocrites and eager to power. "When the King wants something done, I do it" (Act I :28). Cromwell seems as a blind servant to do what the king wants.

There are those like Norfolk who follow me because I wear the crown, and there are those like Master Cromwell who follow me because they are jackals with sharp teeth and I am their lion.....  
(Bolt. Act I: 41)

It is apparent that the King and hypocrite officials are ready to do their best to put More in a position that he cannot defend himself and they were preparing charge after charge to convict him. Thus at first, he is accused of writing an answer of refutation of the book which was issued by the King Council justifying the divorce.

**Cromwell** The book published under the King's name would be more accurate. You wrote that book.

**More** – I wrote no part of it.

**Cromwell** – I do not mean you actually held the pen.

**More** – I merely answered to the best of my ability certain questions on canon law which His Majesty put to me. As I was bound to do.

**Cromwell** – Do you deny that you *instigated* it?

**More** – It was from first to last the King's own project. This is trivial, Master Cromwell. (Bolt. Act II: 89-90)

In a letter to Thomas Cromwell one of the King's Council members More successfully clears himself of this accusation. After a period of time Thomas faced the second charge of having secret meeting with Ann Barton while examination of her case:

One member of the Syon Community, who later gave evidence against the nun, declared that More had spoken to her 'divers times' about her

revelations concerning the king. His evidence is tainted, however, to the extent that it is exactly the kind of thing Thomas Cromwell wished to hear.

(Ackroyd.1998: 413 )

Barton is " a nun who has prophesied evil to the King and to the realm" (Stapleton, 1928 : 153) and again he cleared himself . In this respect, one can note the King and his official's misuse of power to the effect of his case of divorce and any person in any rank in the kingdom is not safe of his strong grip. The King is ready to kill anyone who opposes his will and decisions specially speaking of the nullification of his marriage to Queen Catharine, the case that has turned the history of the state as a whole.

Most of those theologians and canonists who refuse the divorce are extremely accused of high treason, it is the way of suppressing his dissents who are often Killed.

He frequently used charges of treason and heresy to quell dissent, and those accused were often executed without a formal trial by means of bills of attainder..... some of whom were banished or executed when they fell out of his favour. Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, Richard Rich, and Thomas Cranmer all figured prominently in his administration.

("Henry IIIIV of England", 2019 )

The whole country sunk into controversies on the base of Anne Boleyn marriage, a case that led to the reshaping and changing the country's religion, the execution of some officials and even his wives were not safe.

Fisher and More were convicted and beheaded. Between 1536 and 1539, under the direction of Henry's powerful secretary of state, Thomas Cromwell, England's monasteries were suppressed and their vast wealth seized by the Crown.

( Christ et al : 491)

It is a matter of great importance for the King that makes him so violent to English clerics. All know in certain period of time, the Pope of Rom who granted him the title " The defender of the faith for writing a diatribe against Luther "( Christ et al : 491) about ten years later Henry VIII under his rule England moved away from the Church of Rome. Throughout the whole paly the issue of force and power, the power of the king or the power of law partially is evident, it does not matter whether the use of it is in the right path which is supposed to be or just to fulfill the goals and needs of the king himself. Again it is apparent that this power is more destructive if it is not leveled to the proper situation and place. Sir Thomas More as religiously devoted, his loyalty is another part of power of steadfastness of religion that is fixed in the mind of honest monk. It is the power of God which man receives as reward of faithfulness.

## Conclusion

Religion, martyrdom and principles, devotion as well as to these pillars, are consistent in all divine religions. The aim is to achieve a better life for humanity in general and to provide a stable and balanced life in community. Mr. Bolt embodied these tenors in the character of Mr. Thomas Moore in his play *A Man For All Seasons*.

Thomas More has emerged as a religiously committed and conventional to Christianity with all its teachings, and considers it as a firm constitution in the life of community in general and political life in particular, derived from trust in God. As a natural consequence, this love and belief in God led him to sacrifice with what is most precious of what he had. Mr. More knows very well that the commitment to this path leads him to martyrdom, which is the path of the faithful, which runs counter to the corrupt world of politics. That is why the writer presented him as a constant in his belief in his religion and why.

The protagonist is presented in the play as a loving person to the principles of humanity and religion, which are obtained of his religion. Therefore, the hero did not bend either to the power of King Henry and his spies as long as he is sure that the latter is not right. Morope unbargaining in the play presented his character as a great example of a religiously and morally committed human being in his community. Mr. Bolt revealed to the reader the character of Mr. More as human who respects his religion because it is the foundation of order in society. These principles all together represent a way to get rid of political authoritarianism, which Sir. Thomas More rejects in the play.

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