
An Evaluation of the Film, *Man for All Seasons*, With Fred Zinnemann as the Director

A Man for All Seasons (1966), directed by Fred Zinnemann and starring Paul Scofield and Robert Shaw, recounts the events of the life of Sir Thomas More, an important statesman and Renaissance humanist in England. He becomes caught between his beliefs and his King as the Church of England separates from the Papacy due to King Henry VIII's desire to divorce his wife. Set in the early 16th Century England, the film focuses on the events of Henry VIII's reformation and Thomas More's opposition to it. However, its broader historical context is during the late Renaissance and early Protestantism. England had long been an ardent supporter of Catholicism, but all changed when Henry VIII made himself the head of Anglican Church. This proved to be one of the most important changes in England's history, as it dictated the attitude of the English people and their actions for centuries to come. One example of this is England's motive to colonize the new world in the 17th Century, as to compete with the Catholic nations also expanding. This time period was the decisive hour of English history.

The film is extremely informative to those who are not knowledgeable in the time period. It teaches about the reasons why the English Church separated, and how it went about it. It does not focus on the world's reaction to the separation, but it does show England's own reaction. It is extremely accurate in the details of the acts, for example, the Act of Supremacy in 1534 and the First Succession Act. Personally, I found it interesting to learn about the person that was Thomas More, and his beliefs and philosophies. To me, he was more known as the author of *Utopia*; I was ignorant of his involvement in the separation of England from the Catholic Church. I also found it interesting to learn about his trial, and the beginnings of modern court law.

One scene which struck me was the one in which More was being interrogated by the three officers of the King. He was being questioned about his beliefs but refused to give in. His manner and his logic was intelligent and almost mocking of those trying to trick him into making a "confession" or a declaration of opposition. As a lawyer, More knew the law, and knew what actions would name him treasonous. When he said that Cromwell should threaten with Justice, and Cromwell said he was being threatened with Justice, More replied, "then I do not feel threatened."

Based on my knowledge of the time, the film was historically accurate. I doubt every event occurred exactly as it did in the film, if it occurred at all (for example, the King's visit to More's home) but it is miniscule and makes no matter. It would be quite difficult to achieve perfect accuracy, especially when those in the 16th Century spoke a different manner of English. As for

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

the broader context, I believe it to be extremely accurate. Dress, relationships, method of transportation, location, all were accurate.

The purpose of the film was to bring to light the story of Thomas More, the Renaissance humanitarian and Catholic philosopher. The events of the separation of the Churches are well documented and known. The events themselves are quite boring, and it would not do to make a film about them; however using them as a setting and context makes for interesting insight into the thinking of the people during the time, as the film focuses on More. It is also to bring More into the limelight of the Renaissance humanists, as he is frequently forgotten in the shadow of those like Petrarch and Da Vinci. It is also to provide an entertaining film, as it does not serve to provide any sort of memorable lesson.

As an audience, we are expected to be entertained by the insightful look into the life of More, and to learn about the events of the separation of the English Church from the Papacy. The injustice that happened to More was wrong, yes, but it was not so injustice as to be inhumane. It was simply a dispute between belief and refusal to obey that resulted in the authority removing the opposition, which, is quite common in history. So, the audience is not supposed to pity More, rather, to remember him and to learn from his beliefs. His idea of Utopia, or the perfect society, was the goal of the Renaissance, and if human civilization truly wants to become advance themselves past the animal state, then we best listen to those like More.

The film was extremely successful in its production, winning six Oscars (including Best Actor, Best Screenplay, Best Director and Best Film) and being nominated for another two. However, its success with the audience is not so widespread. Those who have seen it enjoyed it and understood its message, but it is not so popular as it hoped to be. It is not quite the 60's epic like Ben Hur, or Spartacus. It was a good production, but not so entertaining. It is interesting, to think that the most entertaining films and events are glorious and violent, yet humanity's goal is supposed to be above such brutal and uncivilized practices.

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)