Conscience Essay, Research Paper

Conscience

Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines conscience as “the

sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one’s own

conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do

right or good.” In A Man for All Seasons, each character’s conscience plays the

ultimate role in the outcome of the story. “Individual conscience” is trait

that each character possesses. This trait differs in intensity throughout the

play in each of the main characters. Sir Thomas More and King Henry VIII show

their unchangeable conscience, by their actions. More refuses to accept the

King’s divorce of Catherine, and marriage to Anne. The King appoints More to

Lord Chancellor, hoping to persuade Sir Thomas to accept his marriage. King

Henry wants everyone to accept his divorce. He believes he is right for going

against Pope’s ruling, and he wants all his royal subjects, and men of

popularity to accept his decision. This is the King’s “individual conscience”

talking . He fears that without the acceptance from Thomas, Lord Chancellor,

that he has made God angry, and he will pay for his unsupported decision.

Sir Thomas More was the only character that believed and stuck with his

conscience, by doing so, it cost him his life. Sir Thomas was a very prominent

member of the King’s council, he was the only member whom did not take bribes to

sway his decision. Sir Thomas had always trusted in his conscience. He

believed that the right way, and God’s way lies in the conscience. Sir Thomas

was separated between church and state, and he stuck with his decision. The

King liked More, he liked him so much, that he promoted Sir Thomas to Lord

Chancellor. This decision was also to help sway More into accepting his

marriage to Anne. However, when the King comes to More asking for his blessing,

More refuses, and resigns as Chancellor. The King becomes furious and storms

off. More now has the hardest decisions to make. He has to choose between

saying he accepts the King’s marriage, or sticking with his conscience and

paying the ultimate cost, the cost of loosing his family and his life.

Alice More, Sir Thomas’ wife has a conscience much weaker than that of

he husband’s. She is willing to accept the King’s marriage to Anne, for this

marriage means nothing to her or her family, nor does this affect her life in

any major way. This is why she is so demanding of Thomas to go against his

conscience, and save himself, and the well being of the family. Thomas’

stubborn actions caused Alice to become angry and frustrated with him. She did

not understand how Thomas could allow himself to be persecuted and executed for

not accepting the King’s marriage.

Thomas’s daughter Margaret wasn’t a strong as her father with her

conscience. She could say something without meaning it in the heart. Margaret

was all forgiving, when Sir Thomas resigned as Chancellor, no one would remove

the chain from his neck. She removed it for him, even though she thought he

should just accept the King’s marriage. She believed it was more important for

Thomas to be there for his family than the church. In a last effort to convince

her father to take the oath, Margaret said to Thomas “God more regards the

thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth.”

The play shows a wide variety of individual consciences, Sir Thomas

More and the King have the strongest ones. Margaret and Alice More were more

easily disposed, they could go against their morals, and say something. Just

because they say something does not mean that they mean it. This is the message

they were trying to pass along to Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas’ decision to stick

with his morals, cost him his life, his family, but not his pride.