

Man and His Conscience, Drama for All Seasons



Paul Scofield, as Thomas More, goes to the executioner's block in "A Man for All Seasons."

New York — In Tudor England, over 400 years ago, a man named Sir Thomas More refused to place his king before his God, and for that was beheaded. A film about that 16th-century man and that long-ago episode has now been made, but "A Man for All Seasons" will not be a success if it is looked at as either biography or history, its director asserts.

"To me," said its famed director, Fred Zinnemann, "this story is contemporary. What interests me are the feelings that man today and man 450 years ago have in common. Another of my films, 'High Noon,' was also the story of a good man who could be pushed so far and no farther. One picture was set in the Old West and one is set in Tudor England. Otherwise, they are not only similar; they are for now as well as for then."

At the same time, in Denver, a priest who has been playing the role of Thomas More in a stage version of "A Man for All Seasons" was interpreting the story of Thomas More — canonized in 1935 — in almost the same way.

"So much of this play is applicable to the present day," remarked the Rev. Gerard Schubert. "More was a gentle man. He was deeply loyal to his king, his country, and his conscience. But he had those things in the

proper order, and he simply could not compromise them.

"The story of his martyrdom touches on the terribly human questions of divided loyalties, the need for statesmen to obey their consciences, even when the popular demand orders them to do likewise, and above all, a great emphasis on not knocking down the law."

The filmed version of "A Man for All Seasons," which follows closely Robert Bolt's prize-winning play, centers on the last seven years of Thomas More's life and his refusal to support King Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon and remarriage to Anne Boleyn and the king's claim to be head of the Church in England.

Thomas More is a respected lawyer and family man and a devout Roman Catholic, resigned as Chancellor of England, was reduced to poverty, imprisoned for 18 months and eventually executed in 1535 — all for his refusal to compromise his conscience.

His actions were all the more heroic when it is learned that even the clergy of his day took advantage of an "escape clause" in a required oath of allegiance to the king, a clause that said, "so far as it be not contrary to the Law of God."

In the film, as on the London and Broadway stage, the part of

Thomas More is played by Paul Scofield, considered to be one of England's leading actors. "A Man for All Seasons," however, is only his second major film. He co-starred with Burt Lancaster in "The Train," portraying a German officer.

Orson Welles portrays Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, More's predecessor as Chancellor of England, who unsuccessfully sought More's assistance in attempting to bring about Papal approval of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn.

The other major roles in the film are held by Wendy Hiller, who portrays More's wife Alice; Susannah York, who plays his daughter Margaret; and, as Henry VIII, Robert Shaw — whom moviegoers might recognize as James Bond's adversary in "From Russia, With Love."

In his life, More was recognized — and still is — as a prime example of "the Renaissance man." In fact, an observation by a contemporary of More's provided playwright Bolt with the title for his drama:

"More is a man of angel's wit and singular learning; I know not his fellow. For where is the man of that gentleness, lowliness and affability? And as time requireth, a man of marvellous mirth and pastimes; and sometimes of as sad gravity: a man for all seasons."

More is often held up as the ideal for the layman who seeks sanctity. "Butler's Lives of the Saints" notes: "Some saints have attained their honors by redeeming an indifferent or even sinful life by martyrdom; not so Thomas More. He was from first to last a holy man, living in the spirit of his own prayer:

"Give me, good Lord, a longing to be with thee: not for the avoiding of the calamities of this wicked world, nor so much for the avoiding of the pains of Purgatory, nor of the pains of Hell neither, nor so much for the attaining of the joys of Heaven in respect of mine own commodity, as even for a very love of thee. And this when his ways were cast, not in the cloister, but in the ordinary places of the world — home and family, among scholars and lawyers in tribunals, council chambers and royal courts."

But it was poet Phyllis McGinley who has perhaps best expressed St. Thomas More's appeal to the modern layman when she wrote:

"Some saints are alien, hard to love,
Wild as an eagle, strange as a dove,
Too near to heaven for the mind to scan.
But Thomas More was a family man . . ."

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Aquinas Color Guard Wins

The crack Aquinas Institute Color Guard, New York State Champions, continued its winning ways last Saturday when it captured first place in the Preview of Champions at Sherburne, N.Y.

Scoring 96.6 points out of a possible 100 points, the Aquinas Guard won by a full point over the Titans of Frankfort, N.Y. Third place was won by the Wildcats of Camillus and fourth place went to the Apple Knockers of Geneva. Eleven guards, representing the top color guards of the state, competed.

Mike Christman of Aquinas was presented with an award as best color guard captain.

Aquinas took first place in the American Legion State contest in Albany last summer. In September the 17-man guard in competition with 50 color guards from throughout the state, placed first in Syracuse at the New York State Exposition contest.

Recent Movie Ratings

Following are the title of films reviewed this week by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures.

Class A, Section II
Red Tomahawk

Class A, Section III
Hot Rod To Hell
Hotel

FILMS ABOUT TOWN

A MENTION OF MOTION PICTURES OF MORE THAN ROUTINE INTEREST

Any Wednesday — "An improvement on the original Broadway comedy. With Jane Fonda as the girl, Jason Robards as the tycoon who has tucked her away in his company's executive suite, Rosemary Murphy as the tycoon's wife, and Dean Jones as the girl's rescuer. The clever screenplay is by Julius J. Epstein." — New Yorker Mag.

Georgy Girl — "Lynn Redgrave, James Mason, Alan Bates and Charlotte Rampling acting their talented heads off in a wry English comedy." — New Yorker Mag.

Alfie — "A modern rake who regards women as convenient objects is brought to the realization that his way of life is senseless. Adult theme and controversial in treatment, the film succeeds as a contemporary morality play. With Michael Caine." — Catholic Film Newsletter.

The Fortune Cookie — "Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon in a sour, funny comedy about a crooked lawyer and his last-minute come-uppance. Directed by Billy Wilder." — New Yorker Mag.

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum — "A successful replica of the bawdy Broadway musical. With Zero Mostel, Phil Silvers, Jack Gilford, Buster Keaton, and hundreds of pretty girls. Directed by Richard Lester." — New Yorker Mag.

Diabolique — "A chilling description of how the wife and mistress of a cad join forces to bring about his elimination. With Vera Clouzot, Simone Signoret, and Paul Neurisse." — New Yorker Mag.

Hotel Paradiso — "The locale of this beautifully photographed color and wide-screen effort is Paris in the first years of twentieth century. The story is a bedroom farce complete with mistaken identities and broad characterization. The cast is a first rate including Alec Guinness, Gina Lollobrigida, Robert Morley, Douglas Byng and Akim Tamiroff. What producer-director Peter Glenville sadly omitted was the first piece and split-second timing that this kind of thing requires." — Catholic Film Newsletter

The Liquidator — "British agent Trevor Howard engages Rod Taylor to kill suspected traitors before they can defect to the enemy. Taylor finds that he is unable to kill in cold blood; so, using some of his high pay, he hires a professional killer to do the jobs for him. This is the basic plot for some good tongue-in-cheek action material that director Jack Cardiff handles with diverting zest. Well photographed in color this is one of the better done espionage films." — Catholic Film Newsletter



'Christmas That Almost Wasn't'

Rossano Brazzi stars as a Scrooge-like character in the Childhood Productions film, "The Christmas That Almost Wasn't," scheduled to be shown in the Rochester area during the Christmas holidays. (Catholic Press Features)

Family Rosary

Friday, Dec. 9 — Joseph F. Norris of Holy Ghost parish.

Saturday, Dec. 10 — (Mass will be celebrated.) — Representative of St. Patrick's Fraternity, Third Order of St. Francis.

Sunday, Dec. 11 — Lawrence J. Ryan, St. John the Evangelist parish, with Knights of Columbus Council 178.

Monday, Dec. 12 — William Gaffney, St. Joseph's, with Holy Name Society members.

Tuesday, Dec. 13 — Clarence Erbland, St. Philip Neri.

Wednesday, Dec. 14 — Representative of Holy Ghost Men's Club.

Thursday, Dec. 15 — Representative of St. George's Holy Name Society.

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