“Conflict of conscience can be just as difficult as conflict between people.”

Matt felt sick. His stomach churned with the violence of a storm-ridden sea. He could feel bile rising in his throat and his palms were clammy and clenched on his thighs. Yes, his actions had been provocative. He shouldn’t have acted so...so...defensively? He was defending himself, and now he was paying for it. In a sense. Sitting in the corridor, waiting to be called in was enough torture in Matt’s opinion. He only meant to make a point, to stand up for himself. He could hear the words in his mind now, as if they were coming from his teachers himself; ‘pansy,’ ‘weak,’ ‘faggot’. That had been the last straw and he had stood up and yelled, then ended up here. Heart thrumming a constant tattoo on his chest. Was he going to be expelled? Suspended for putting that homophobic slimeball in his place? Probably. Oh, he probably was! What will my parents say? Will we have to move? What about all of my friends? Matt’s fingernails dug into his thighs. Why did he have to be so stupid? Why couldn’t he just let it go over his head like all the other times?

Galileo walked through the hall. The men, dark cloaks wrapped around their shoulders, smiled sadistically at him. Instrument after instrument was presented to him, each with a blasé description, each the more bone-chilling. He felt sick. ‘Your hands would go here,’ they said, ‘and this will clamp down on your throat.’ Galileo felt his insides shift and turn upside down. His eyes wide and his heart thrumming as he looked at the blood stained wood and the sharp, jagged iron. Death or recant? The shame of denouncing all that is true and factual about science, about his life; or bones being stretched at horrific angles and skin being ripped at the seams. He know what Copernicus did, a braver man than him, although they did say he was mad. Was Galileo mad for taking on the Church? Yes he was. He could see his madness reflected right back at him in the devices of torture. ‘I don’t want to dishonour the truth,’ he thought to himself, ‘but I don’t wish to die like this either.’

Matt had to steel himself. He couldn’t take back his actions now. He had to deal with the consequences, be reprimanded, deal with the shame of telling his parents what happened at school today of all days. Please be understanding, please don’t make me move schools. The doorknob turned and Matt’s heart leapt from his ribcage and landed behind his tongue. The old hinges creaked as the heavy oak door moved with a horror-film-like sluggishness.

‘Matt, you may come in now.’

Galileo stood, hand pressed to the bible, vile and false words pouring from his mouth. Surely his life was more important? The words were simple, any man could say them, but the gut-wrenching feeling associated with them made Galileo feel like he was trying to speak a language never spoken before. He realized with horror that the recanting was simple, yet he knew now that his life would never be the same. How will he explain to those who believed him, who saw the truth, how will he explain the pain inside of him? They couldn’t possibly understand the terror that lies in the hall beneath him, the ghastly screams that echoed in the unnatural levers. He was a coward, yes. In his conscience he would forever know that he ran from the truth. That he walked with his chin pressed to his chest, away from the all of torture, into the safe arms of recanting the truth about life itself.
His mind plagued with all the horrific possibilities. Sometimes the fear inside your mind is torture enough.

Assessor comments
□ The chosen form works well to explore the idea in the prompt.
□ A telling link between the prompt and the text.
□ The juxtaposition is interesting, although lacks full breadth of insight.
□ Simple in some ways but demonstrates parallels.
□ It is a readable, interesting approach.
□ Expression is strong and appropriate for the approach taken.
□ While there are flaws, this is still an upper-range response.