

## More's Letter to His Daughter Margaret, 17 April 1534

*Sir Thomas More, upon warning given him, came before the King's Commissioners at the Archbishop of Canterbury's place at Lambeth (the Monday the thirteenth day of April in the year of our Lord 1534, and in the latter end of the twenty-fifth year of the reign of King Henry the Eighth), where he refused the oath then offered unto him. And thereupon was he delivered to the Abbot of Westminster to be kept as a prisoner, with whom he remained till Friday following, and then was sent prisoner to the Tower of London. And shortly after his coming thither he wrote a letter and sent unto his eldest daughter Mistress Margaret Roper, the copy whereof here followeth.*

c. 17 April, 1534  
Tower of London

When I was before the Lords at Lambeth, I was the first that was called in, albeit Master Doctor the Vicar of Croydon was come before me, and divers others. After the cause of my sending for, declared unto me (whereof I somewhat marveled in my mind, considering that they sent for no more temporal men but me), I desired the sight of the oath, which they showed me under the great seal. Then desired I the sight of the Act of the Succession, which was delivered me in a printed roll. After which read secretly by myself, and the oath considered with the act, I showed unto them that my purpose was not to put any fault either in the act or any man that made it, or in the oath or any man that swore it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself in good faith my conscience so moved me in the matter that though I would not deny to swear to the succession, yet unto the oath that there was offered me I could not swear, without the iubarding of my soul to perpetual damnation. And that if they doubted whether I did refuse the oath only for the grudge of my conscience, or for any other fantasy, I was ready therein to satisfy them by mine oath. Which if they trusted not, what should they be the better to give me any oath? And if they trusted that I would therein swear true, then trusted I that of their goodness they would not move me to swear the oath that they offered me, perceiving that for to swear it was against my conscience.

Unto this my Lord Chancellor said that they all were sorry to hear me say thus, and see me thus refuse the oath. And they said all that on their faith I was the very first that ever refused it; which would cause the King's Highness to con-ceive great suspicion of me and great indignation toward me. And therewith they showed me the roll, and let me see the names of the lords and the commons which had sworn, and subscribed their names already. Which notwithstanding when they saw that I refused to swear the same myself, not blaming any other man that had sworn, I was in conclusion commanded to go down into the garden, and thereupon I tarried in the old burned chamber, that looketh into the garden and would not go down because of the heat. In that time saw I Master Doctor Latimer come into the garden, and there walked he with divers other doctors and chaplains of my Lord of Canterbury, and very merry I saw him, for he laughed, and took one or twain about the neck so handsomely, that if they had been women, I would have went he had been waxen wanton. After that came Master Doctor Wilson forth from the lords and was with two gentlemen brought by me, and gentlemanly sent straight unto the Tower. What

time my Lord of Rochester was called in before them, that cannot I tell. But at night I heard that he had been before them, but where he remained that night, and so forth till he was sent hither, I never heard. I heard also that Master Vicar of Croydon, and all the remnant of the priests of London that were sent for, were sworn, and that they had such favor at the council's hand that they were not lingered nor made to dance any long attendance to their travail and cost, as suitors were sometimes wont to be, but were sped apace to their great comfort so far forth that Master Vicar of Croydon, either for gladness or for dryness, or else that it might be seen (*quod ille notus erat pontifici*) went to my Lord's buttery bar and called for drink, and drank (*valde familiariter*).

When they had played their pageant and were gone out of the place, then was I called in again. And then was it declared unto me what a number had sworn, even since I went inside, gladly, without any sticking. Wherein I laid no blame in no man, but for my own self answered as before. Now as well before as then, they somewhat laid unto me for obstinacy, that where as before, sith I refused to swear, I would not declare any special part of that oath that grudged my conscience, and open the cause wherefore. For thereunto I had said to them, that I feared lest the King's Highness would as they said take displeasure enough toward me for the only refusal of the oath. And that if I should open and disclose the causes why, I should therewith but further exasperate his Highness, which I would in no wise do, but rather would I abide all the danger and harm that might come toward me, than give his Highness any occasion of further displeasure than the offering of the oath unto me of pure necessity constrained me. Howbeit when they divers times imputed this to me for stubbornness and obstinacy that I would neither swear the oath nor yet declare the causes why, I declined thus far toward them that rather than I would be accounted for obstinate, I would upon the King's gracious license or rather his such commandment had as might be my sufficient warrant that my declaration should not offend his Highness, nor put me in the danger of any of his statutes, I would be content to declare the causes in writing; and over that to give an oath in the beginning, that if I might find those causes by any man in such wise answered as I might think mine own conscience satisfied, I would after that with all mine heart swear the principal oath, too.

To this I was answered that though the King would give me license under his letters patent, yet would it not serve against the statute. Whereto I said that yet if I had them, I would stand unto the trust of his honor at my peril for the remnant. But yet it thinketh me, lo, that if I may not declare the causes without peril, then to leave them undeclared is no obstinacy.

My Lord of Canterbury taking hold upon that that I said, that I condemned not the conscience of them that sware, said unto me that it appeared well that I did not take it for a very sure thing and a certain that I might not lawfully swear it, but rather as a thing uncertain and doubtful. But then (said my Lord) you know for a certainty and a thing without doubt that you be bounden to obey your sovereign lord your King. And therefore are ye bounden to leave off the doubt of your unsure conscience in refusing the oath, and take the sure way in obeying of your prince, and swear it. Now all was it so that in mine own mind methought myself not concluded, yet this argument seemed me suddenly so subtle and namely with such authority coming out of so noble a prelate's mouth, that I could again answer nothing thereto but only that I thought myself I might not well do so, because that in my conscience this was one of the cases in which I was bounden that I should not obey my prince, sith that whatsoever other folk thought in the matter (whose conscience and learning I would not condemn nor take upon me to judge), yet in my conscience

the truth seemed on the other side. Wherein I had not informed my conscience neither suddenly nor slightly but by long leisure and diligent search for the matter. And of truth if that reason may conclude, than have we a ready way to avoid all perplexities. For in whatsoever matters the doctors stand in great doubt, the King's commandment given upon whither side he list soyleth all the doubts.

Then said my Lord of Westminster to me that howsoever the matter seemed unto mine own mind, I had cause to fear that mine own mind was erroneous when I see the great council of the realm determine of my mind the contrary, and that therefore I ought to change my conscience. To that I answered that if there were no more but myself upon my side and the whole Parliament upon the other, I would be sore afraid to lean to mine own mind only against so many. But on the other side, if it so be that in some things for which I refuse the oath, I have (as I think I have) upon my part as great a council and a greater too, I am not then bounden to change my conscience, and confirm it to the council of one realm, against the general council of Christendom. Upon this Master Secretary (as he that tenderly favoereth me), said and swore a great oath that he had lever that his own only son (which is of truth a goodly young gentleman, and shall I trust come to much worship) had lost his head than that I should thus have refused the oath. For surely the King's Highness would now conceive a great suspicion against me, and think that the matter of the nun of Canterbury was all contrived by my drift. To which I said that the contrary was true and well known, and whatsoever should mishap me, it lay not in my power to help it without peril of my soul. Then did my Lord Chancellor repeat before me my refusal unto Master Secretary, as to him that was going unto the King's Grace. And in the rehearsing, his Lordship repeated again that I denied not but was content to swear to the succession. Where-unto I said that as for that point, I would be content, so that I might see my oath in that point so framed in such a manner as might stand with my conscience.

Then said my Lord: "Marry, Master Secretary mark that too, that he will not swear that neither but under some certain manner." "Verily no, my Lord," quoth I, "but that I will see it made in such wise first, as I shall myself see, that I shall neither be forsworn nor swear against my conscience. Surely as to swear to the succession I see no peril, but I thought and think it reason that to mine own oath I look well myself, and be of counsel also in the fashion, and never intended to swear for a pece, and set my hand to the whole oath. Howbeit (as help me God), as touching the whole oath, I never withdrew any man from it, nor never advised any to refuse it, nor never put, nor will, any scruple in any man's head, but leave every man to his own conscience. And methinketh in good faith that so were it good reason that every man should leave me to mine.

Thomas More.

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