

LETTER TO A FRIEND

John Cooke (1608–1660)

John Cooke trained as a lawyer and early embraced Parliament's cause. Cromwell choose Cooke to serve as Chief Justice for the trial of Charles I. Unlike many Regicides, after the Restoration Cooke refused both to flee England and to negotiate with Charles II. Arrested, tried, and convicted of treason, Cooke received a capital sentence. While awaiting his execution, he wrote the following letter.

Tower of London, October 1660

...I desire that all my thoughts, words, and actions may please God, and that all that He does may please me. And I do freely forgive my adversaries, the Lord herein increase my faith (Luke 17:5) and I bless God, I have a quiet conscience as to the world, and which is good also, for being justified by Christ, apprehended by faith, I have peace with God (Romans 5:1).

And so I descend to the cause for which I am in bonds, which is as good as ever it was; and I believe there is not a saint that has engaged with us but will wish at the last day that he had sealed to the truth of it with his blood, if thereunto called. For I am satisfied that it is the most noble and glorious cause that has been agitated for God and Christ since the Apostolical times; being for truth, holiness, and righteousness, for our liberties as men and as Christians, for removing of all yokes and oppressions, for a Gospel magistracy and ministry, and not only for the priestly and prophetic offices of Christ Jesus, but for His kingly also; the peculiar light and work of this generation being to discover and oppose the civil and ecclesiastical tyrannies intended upon the nations by the Pope's leger-de-main; to exalt Christ as lord and king over men's consciences, to magnify and make the law of God honourable and authentic everywhere, and to give justice and mercy the upper-hand.

As I hear nothing what they intend to do with me, so I am not much solicitous about it. I do freely trust God to make what bargain for me He pleases. I believe they are as angry with me as any man in the nations, because *litera scripta manet*; but their cause requires rather silence than eloquence. As for that against monarchy unaccountable, they will be ashamed to oppose it; that which touches them is the stating the case, for which I had vouchers and warrants for every word, but now they plow with our heifers. Yet great is the truth, and that will prevail. As for petitioning, there is not any. I cannot confess any guilt; it is such a cause that the martyrs would gladly come again from Heaven to suffer for, if they might.

Though too many object against me (1 Peter 4:15; Let none of you suffer as a murderer), I look upon it as the most noblest and highest act of justice that our story can parallel. And so far as I had a hand in it, never any one action in all my life comes to my mind with less regret or trouble of conscience than that does. For the blood must lie upon him, or the Parliament; and I am sure I had no more malice in my heart than when I was in my cradle. All that I can be sorry for is that I had not such pure and unbiased aims at the glory of God and exaltation of Christ therein as I should have had. I neither did anything *dubitante*, or *reluctante conscientia*. I was so far from a gain-saying conscience in anything I acted that I never scrupled in the least, and the generality of the people have since owned it. I was in mercy a poor advocate for Christ and the people of England; and if by my blood their cause may be watered, I say (as Philippians 2:17–18) to you and the rest of the Church of Christ, if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, let us rejoice together. It has been counted shameful for soldiers to run from their colours, or desert their masters and principles, but it is more odious for a counselor to prevaricate and betray his client's cause.

I am persuaded that all those that have had a chief hand and are now giving judgment against themselves and all good people, in all those points which they formerly contended for against the King—as the lawfulness of the war, which was granted both here and at Edinburgh, the militia, negative voice, power to dissolve Parliaments, conferring great offices (as King James said, “So long as I make bishops and judges, I will have what religion and laws I please.”). As they are most abominable prevaricators of the honest interest; so they will wish at the last day that they had been Jews, Turks, or Indians; for the greater light, the greater is their apostasy and

ingratitude (II Peter 2:21). And sure they will have a peculiar judgment by themselves; for they do openly proclaim the cause of Barabbas before the cause of Jesus.

Peter denied Christ and Judas betrayed Him, but it was before His passion and ascension; they never saw the wonderful works which our eyes have beheld. But what shall we say if the treachery of Judas help forward the work of our salvation? Why may we not hope that God is whetting His tools and gone back to fetch a greater blow against His oppressors. Isaac must not die, though the knife be at his throat (Genesis 12:14). Our case seems to be like theirs under proud Haman; the gallows was erected, but the royal seed preserved (Esther 6:13; Numbers 23). The story of Balaam is much upon my heart; the shout of King Jesus to reign in holiness and righteousness is among His people, I hope as much as ever. And there is no enchantment against Jacob; therefore he must not be afraid. I am persuaded we shall fare the better for the thousand curses we had between Chester and London (II Samuel 16:12).

Now having endeavoured to satisfy you that the great work is over as to my eternal salvation, and my opinion of the goodness of our cause, I shall further entreat your patience to tell you that I am fully convinced that next to that unspeakable gift of Christ, the greatest grace and mercy that God can bestow upon any of us is to call for and enable us to lay down our lives upon this account; suffering for Christ being a strong argument of His electing love (Acts 9:15–16) and a greater matter of rejoicing (Acts 23:11)....

The Indictment, Arraignment, Tryal, and Judgment at Large of Twenty-Nine Regicides, The Murtherers of His Most Sacred Majesty King Charles the 1st (London: Walthoe, 1724):312–315.