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Political and Religious Justifications for the Dutch Revolt: An Examination of Key Pamphlets

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Willem of Orange

1581. Hendrick Goltzius.

Tanis, James and Horst, Daniel. *Images of Discord*. Grand Rapids: Bryn Mawr College Library, 1993.

Introduction

The more that they shall write against me and testify to their rage and their ingrained enmity against this country, the more I will rejoice that God has been pleased to favour me by allowing me to assist in cutting short the course of this insatiable tyranny and by that means also to have been able to help in the introduction of the true Religion.¹

In 1572, William of Orange and his troops, the Sea Beggars, seized the little seaside town of Brill. This commenced the armed resistance against their ruler, Philip II, King of Spain. During the next several decades, the rebels haphazardly augmented their territory. This struggle, now known as the Dutch Revolt, eventually resulted in the establishment of a new state, the Dutch Republic.

But the participants, who shared the general sixteenth century European view that revolt was unacceptable, did not consider themselves part of a rebellion. The Netherlanders insisted that they were not rebelling, they were resisting. Philip was destroying the traditional system of government in the Low Countries and the Netherlanders were defending it.

Many Netherlanders articulated their justifications for battling the Spanish in pamphlets. For instance, William of Orange's *Apologie* explains that he sought to rid the country of "insatiable tyranny" and allow the practice of the "true Religion." This concern for both the political and religious rights of the Netherlandish people is typical of pamphlet writers during the Dutch Revolt. Pamphleteers also communicated their understanding of

¹ Alastair Duke, ed. "Apologie of William of Orange," Dutch Crossing, 22 (1998), 36.

sovereignty as well as the structure and functions of government. This study attempts to explain how the authors' notions of government and religion justified their stance against the Spanish crown.

Chapter One provides the backdrop for this study with an overview of the historical events of the Dutch Revolt as well as a discussion of the value of pamphlets in revealing the thought of the Revolt. Chapter Two summarizes the arguments of the six influential pamphlets which will provide the basis of this study. Chapter Three analyzes the political justifications provided in these pamphlets. What provisions in the government of the Low Countries allowed the Netherlanders to defy Philip? Which events provoked the transition from obedience to resistance? And what did the Netherlanders hope to achieve with their opposition? In Chapter Four, the religious justifications are discussed. Why should the Reformed religion, which only a minority of inhabitants practice, be accepted? Why does Philip's insistence on Roman Catholicism spark the revolt? And how do the pamphleteers argue the religious crisis ought to be resolved? Finally, the answers to these questions are summarized in the conclusion.



Map of the Low Countries

Harline, Craig E. Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic.
Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

Chapter One: Context

Historical Background

In 1555, Philip II succeeded his father, Charles V, as King of Spain and ruler of the Low Countries, the seventeen provinces north of France and west of the Holy Roman Empire. A few decades later, the southern provinces were still under Spanish control, but the northern provinces had rejected Philip's sovereignty and was developing into the independent Dutch Republic. The series of political, religious and military events which led up to the northern provinces' break from Spain is known as the Dutch Revolt.

As ruler of the Low Countries, Philip had to contend with the advance of Protestantism in his lands. Some Netherlanders were highly receptive to Luther's criticism of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church was rife with corruption. Particularly offensive was the selling of indulgences, basically the selling of salvation, in order to raise funds for the Church. Luther questioned the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on images, the sacraments and the importance of priests. He asserted Christ was the sole mediator between God and man, not the church. Luther argued salvation could be obtained through Christ alone and insisted that only the Gospel, the Word of God, could bring Christ into one's life. Beginning in the 1520s, a minority of Netherlanders practiced Lutheranism and other forms of Protestantism. However, it did not become a unified movement until the introduction of Calvinism in the 1550s.

Calvin rejected consubstantiation, the theory that Christ's body is present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. He insisted man does not have free will and Calvin introduced the

theory of predestination, the belief that only those whom God elects are saved. Moreover, most importantly, Calvin offered a clearly defined church organization. His Institutes provided that “stable and orderly structure, both in dogma and organization, needed to counter the fragmentation, and proliferation of theological tendencies, so characteristic of the early Netherlands Reformation.”¹ Reformed Protestantism, the name given to Calvinism in the Low Countries, soon became the dominant strand of Protestantism in the provinces. The Catholic Church had been weakening even before the advent of Protestantism. Philip, a staunch Catholic, was determined to kill two birds with one stone. He intended to eradicate Protestantism and revitalize the Catholic Church.

As part of his plan to revive the Roman Catholic church in the provinces, Philip decided to reorganize its structure. The 1559 papal bull *Super Universas* certified Philip’s proposal to increase the number of bishoprics in the Low Countries. The quality of the clergymen would also be improved. The criteria for appointments would become education, administrative efficiency and Roman Catholic zeal rather than aristocratic connections. With loyal men at the head of the rejuvenated episcopacy, Philip would be better able to enforce his anti-Protestant placards.

In 1561, implementation of the papal bull *Super Universas* began. Protestants naturally feared this strengthening of the Catholic Church’s hold over the provinces but it was also highly unpopular amongst other groups in society. Towns such as Antwerp feared a local bishop would block their trade with German Lutheran merchants. The new system also

¹ Jonathan Israel, The Dutch Republic: Its Rise Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), 103.

threatened to curtail the aristocracy's wealth and power as valuable church positions were less likely to go to noblemen's younger sons.² The reorganization of the episcopacy would strengthen Roman Catholicism at the expense of Protestantism and would consolidate Philip's power at the expense of local authority.

Philip was pursuing a similar policy within his government. When he left the Low Countries in 1559, Philip appointed his illegitimate half-sister, Margaret of Parma, as regent. The upper nobility expected tradition to ensure their positions as her most influential advisors. They tended to favor religious toleration and they hoped to soften the anti-heresy campaign in the Low Countries. However, they found themselves overshadowed by two royal counselors, Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle and Wigle van Aytta (Viglius). The bureaucrats wholly supported Philip's policies of anti-heresy and increased centralization of government. The King assigned Granvelle the task of carrying out the reorganization of the Catholic Church.

The disaffected nobles formed an opposition group to Granvelle. They were led by William of Orange, the wealthiest, most charismatic nobleman. They made use of their connections and influence to ensure that the bishopric program was ill-received by towns and provinces. Granvelle made little progress in restructuring the church and the inhabitants of the Low Countries despised him because they held Granvelle personally responsible for the plan. Philip considered it prudent to make a few concessions to the Netherlanders, including

² E. H. Kossman and A. F. Mellink, Texts Concerning the Dutch Revolt (Cambridge University Press, 1974), 4.

dropping the Antwerp bishopric from the plan as well as dropping Granvelle from government.

Without an immediate replacement of Granvelle, royal authority weakened. There was tremendous pressure on the upper nobles to end the Inquisition. Although he was truly dedicated to the cause of freedom of conscience and religious compromise, Orange's goal was to augment his power in the existing system, not to establish a new government. Orange planned to establish religious tolerance in the provinces and intended to have the upper nobles, led by himself, replace Granvelle and Viglius as the main policy makers.³ The decision not to take resistance further was based on political motivation.

The anti-heresy campaign had gained momentum, however. When the upper nobility refused to take action, the lesser nobles rose to the occasion. In 1566, some 200 lesser nobles "forced their way into Margaret of Parma's presence" with the Petition of Compromise. They ordered an end to the Inquisition and threatened to take up arms if their demand was not met. The lower nobles, who came to be known as the Beggars, avoided attacking the King or the Church. Their resistance was directed only against the Inquisition, a despised institution. But they also made it clear that they considered the anti-heresy campaign subversive of law and society. The threat of revolt terrified Margaret of Parma. She agreed to suspend the religious placards while a delegation petitioned the king to end the inquisition.⁴

With the halting of the Inquisition, Protestant fervor boiled over. Initially it took the form of hedge-preaching, Reformed Protestant preachers giving sermons in the countryside.

³ Israel, 141.

⁴ Israel, 145-6.

Soon thousands of people attended these sermons. Then the religious fervor began to take a more dramatic form; people took to violently destroying Catholic images. The iconoclastic fury swept throughout the Low Countries. Many nobles were taken aback by the upsurge of Protestant violence. However, some Beggars took advantage of the spontaneous outbreak to begin an organized revolt. Several lesser nobles, on the other hand, withdrew their support from the League of Compromise and the upper nobles offered Margaret of Parma their support in repressing the rebellion. With their assistance, Margaret was able to halt the armed insurrection. The defeat intimidated Protestants and they quickly dispersed. Churches closed, sermons ceased and preachers fled the Low Countries. Hundreds of Protestants reconverted to Catholicism. Both the revolt and the Protestant fury were suppressed.⁵

Punishment, however, was already on its way from Spain. The King's troops arrived, headed by the Duke of Alva. Philip had appointed him as Governor-General of the Low Countries. Alva and his council weeded out people responsible for the recent events that the Spanish regarded as a rebellion. His committee came to be known as the 'Blood Council' because it put several hundred people to death. Alva also managed to implement the system of bishoprics the Netherlanders had so strongly resisted. Finally, he introduced severe taxes. The most unpopular one was the "Tenth Penny," which levied a ten percent tax on the sale of all goods. Officially, Alva needed the approval of the States General before he could implement the tax. The States General was the representative body of the Low Countries, composed of delegates from the States of each province. The States General refused to pass

⁵ Israel, 145-53.

the Tenth Penny but Alva forced it through in 1571. The tax was rarely paid but it inspired in the Netherlanders an extreme hatred of Alva.

Resistance to Alva's regime was strong and once again Orange led the opposition group. He had exiled to Germany before Alva's arrival, and he now returned to the Low Countries with the Sea Beggars. They came from England and captured the town of Brill in the province of Holland in 1572. From there they battled Alva's troops to gain more territory. Alva was inhibited by lack of finances and his dissatisfied troops mutinied. They ransacked towns, making the Spanish regime highly unpopular. Meanwhile, Orange quickly engineered independent governments in the liberated provinces of Holland and Zeeland, where he was declared Stadtholder.⁶

The fighting raged on, and the next major turning point occurred when Don Luis de Requesens, Alva's replacement, died in 1576. The resulting vacuum of power prompted the provinces' States to draw up the Pacification of Ghent. It was an agreement between the rebel Protestant provinces of Holland and Zeeland with the Catholic provinces. They agreed to cooperate in order to drive the unruly Spanish troops out of the Low Countries. They also agreed both religions would be tolerated in all the provinces until the States General could discuss the matter further.

Spain's military strategy in 1579 forced the provinces to make another significant decision. The Spanish were rapidly advancing in the south-west and the in the east. Southern provinces decided they could best protect their interests by concentrating all their military strength in the Walloon region to the south, ignoring Gelderland and Overijssel to the east.

⁶ Israel, 175.

Holland and Zeeland's interests, meanwhile, lay to the north. These provinces considered the threat to the east the most urgent and thus supported Gelderland and Overijssel. The traditional differences between the southern and northern provinces cemented the two groups into what eventually became the Spanish controlled Low Countries and the autonomous United Provinces.⁷ In an effort to strengthen their alliance, the northern provinces drew up the Union of Utrecht in 1579. The Union is generally recognized as the start of the new republic.

Because he believed the Netherlands required foreign support in their war against Spain, Orange advocated inviting the French king's younger brother, the Duke of Anjou, to become the sovereign of the Low Countries. In January of 1581, Anjou officially accepted his position as "prince and lord of the Netherlands". However, it was not until July that the States General finally repudiated Philip II and his heirs with the Act of Abjuration. It required all office holders to swear new oaths of loyalty to the States and support the government in its opposition to Philip and Spain. Philip's portrait was removed from coins and the Habsburg coat of arms was removed from public documents. "The revolt against the king of Spain was now enshrined in every transaction no matter how large or small."⁸ This was an immense and sometimes difficult transition for people to make.

In 1585, the Netherlands once again sought foreign assistance, this time asking Queen Elizabeth of England to become the sovereign of the United Provinces. Elizabeth had reservations about becoming directly involved in the conflict so she offered the United

⁷ Israel, 199.

⁸ Israel, 210.

Provinces a compromise in which she would provide financial and military assistance in return for a say in military and political decisions. By signing the Treaty of Nonesuch, the United Provinces concluded its first agreement with a foreign state.⁹

Elizabeth was also responsible for another milestone in the creation of the Dutch Republic. She sent the Earl of Leicester to act as the military and political head of the United Provinces. Naturally, the States General required this appointment to be formally recognized. Elizabeth refused to do the honors because she did not wish to be perceived as the sovereign with Leicester as her governor. The States General felt compelled to grant Leicester the authority itself. The government body reluctantly claimed sovereignty in 1586 by penning a document which granted Leicester the powers of Governor-General. Sovereignty was now considered to lay with the States.¹⁰

Once again, neither the Dutch nor Leicester were satisfied with the arrangement of government. Leicester returned to England in 1587 and the Dutch finally accepted full control. Orange was assassinated in 1584 so Oldenbarnevelt assumed the lead in the political realm. He had been appointed Advocate of Holland by the States General in 1586. He was an expert statesman and under his direction the States General grew in power and it gained popularity. Maurice of Nassau, Orange's son, was largely responsible for the burgeoning Republic's military success. He later became Oldenbarnevelt's main rival and eventually replaced him as the main political figure of the Republic until his death in 1625.

⁹ Israel, 220.

¹⁰ Kossman and Mellink, 47-8.

Oldenbarnevelt and Maurice of Nassau were largely responsible for consolidating and securing an independent Dutch Republic by the seventeenth century.

Pamphlet Writing

In addition to the political and religious revolutions, which occurred in the Low Countries during the latter half of the sixteenth century, a printing revolution took place as well. Initially, Antwerp, one of the biggest trading centers in Europe, was the Low Countries' center of printing activity. Between 1500 and 1540, 2,250 works were printed in Antwerp.¹¹ This growth continued and from 1550 onward, Antwerp and then Holland were the printing capitals of Europe.¹²

One type of work which continually rolled off the presses was the pamphlet, a printed work intended to persuade the reader of a political argument.¹³ In the 1570s, it is estimated at least 50,000 copies of pamphlets were available in any given year.¹⁴ Each important political event generated a new wave of pamphlets. According to Martin van Gelderen, "the use of printed material as a medium for political and religious discussion... during the Dutch Revolt was without precedence in the albeit still short history of the Dutch printing-press."¹⁵

¹¹ Geoffrey Parker, The Dutch Revolt (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1977), 26.

¹² Craig E. Harline, Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), x.

¹³ Harline, 15.

¹⁴ Harline, 21.

¹⁵ Martin van Gelderen, The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555-1590 (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 290.

Pamphlet writing was a relatively new trend because, traditionally, only those involved in the church or in government engaged in discussions of religion and politics.¹⁶ Treatises which criticized the government were usually banned. During the Revolt, however, between the battles and the various governments, there was probably little in the way of censorship to inhibit the pamphleteering. People harbored strong convictions during the Revolt and felt compelled to express their views in pamphlets. Throughout this turbulent period, pamphleteering flourished in the Low Countries.

central gov.

Because rebelling against a king was a grave offense, Netherlanders sought to justify their resistance, often to an international audience. The pamphlet writers generally argued that the revolt began because of religious conflict. Philip insisted the Netherlandish people practice Roman Catholicism even though Netherlandish government officials strongly advised Philip to be more lenient. He resorted to violence to enforce his religious placards. Catholics and Protestants alike argued that no man, not even the king, has the right to govern over a man's conscience. Because religion is not in the king's jurisdiction, pamphleteers argue Netherlanders should not adhere to Philip's decrees. In fact, they should actively resist the placards. The pamphleteers argue that instead of insisting upon one religion, Philip should tolerate both religions. In theory, had Philip allowed people to choose their own religion, the Revolt would never have taken place.

The scope of the argument, however, extends beyond religion. According to the pamphleteers, freedom of conscience is only one of several rights granted to the Netherlanders by their constitutional laws, privileges, charters, customs and institutions. The

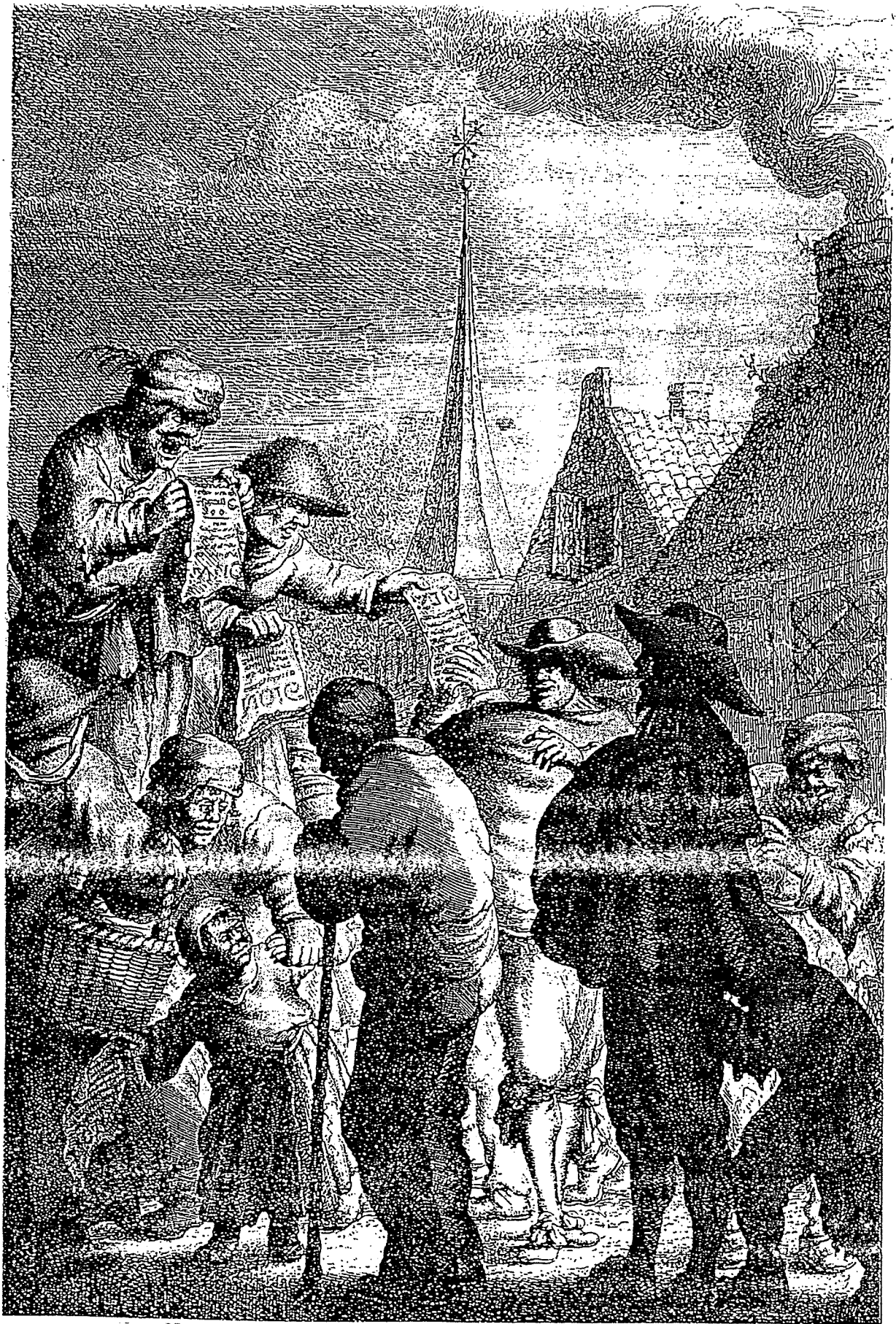
¹⁶ Harline, 2.

original argument, which allowed Netherlanders to resist Philip because his religious placards violated their right to freedom of conscience, is extended to the other rights. Furthermore, the system of government is claimed to grant them license to disobey and forcefully oppose a ruler who violates any of their rights. Because Philip violated their rights and privileges, the Netherlanders are certified in repudiating Philip's authority. The goal of these pamphlets is to persuade the reader the Netherlanders are acting according to an established code.

Pamphlets were in demand because Netherlanders were interested in reading about political events. The works were certainly profitable for printers and booksellers, which is evidenced by their business records. The writers, however, probably made little money with their pamphlets. They wrote because they harbored strong opinions and because they believed their publications affected public opinion.¹⁷ Because of their influence, there was a cyclical relationship between pamphlets and contemporary events. Political events forced authors to refine their thoughts; their thoughts, in turn, had an effect on subsequent events. "The political developments of the Revolt challenged the authors of political treatises to formulate their arguments in more and more detail, whereby each extension of argument conditioned political action and further political argumentation."¹⁸ Because they not only reflected the thought of the Dutch Revolt but also influenced it, pamphlets are a valuable source for exploring the political and religious justifications the Netherlanders gave for revolting against their king.

¹⁷ Harline, 106-7.

¹⁸ van Gelderen, Political Thought, 164.



De Pamflettenverkooper (The Pamphlet Seller)

Harline, Craig E. Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic.
Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

Chapter Two: Introduction to the Sources

*A Defence and True Declaration of the things lately done in the lowe Countrey whereby
may easily be seen to whom all the beginning and cause of the late troubles and
calamities is to be imputed*

After the defeat of the Protestant revolt in 1567, many Netherlanders who feared the King's retaliation fled to Germany. There were prominent nobles among them, including William of Orange. The Netherlanders were outraged by the harsh punishment Alva inflicted on their countrymen. William of Orange decided to head an attempt to rescue the provinces from Alva's tyranny. In need of financial assistance for the invasion, the rebels presented the German Reichstag with the *Libellus supplex Imperatoriae Maiestati*, a petition for funds, in 1570. The *Defence* is the English translation which was published in London in 1571. The author was most likely Philip Marnix van St Aldegonde¹, a Flemish noble who later became Orange's secretary and principal publicist.²

The rebels had reason to hope the Germans would sympathize with their plight for religious freedom. Protestantism was permitted in some areas of Germany because of the Peace of Augsburg's declaration "cuius regio, eius religio" (whose region, his religion). The *Defence*, an appeal for German support, refers to the Low Countries as 'low Germany' and plays down the differences between German Lutheranism and Netherlandish Reformed

¹ van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 123.

² Israel, 153-4.

Protestantism. It discusses at length the harsh treatment the provinces have received from the corrupt, power hungry Spanish Inquisitors in the name of religion. The Netherlanders have “more than fifty years with incredible patience born the Inquisitors’ most cruel yoke.”³

However, the *Defence* argues religion is only the tip of the iceberg. It claims the Spanish Inquisitors are using religion as an excuse to infiltrate the country and rob the Netherlanders of their political rights. The conspirators trample on the past treaties which guarantee their liberty and ignore the States General which protects their liberty. Their disregard for the Netherlanders’ rights and privileges indicates the conspirators plan to completely subdue the Low Countries. One conspirator wrote, “there will arise unto the king great fruit and commodity by the incommodious tumults of Belgium, because by this occasion, the king will bring them to full obedience and subjection, and reduce the state into that form and order of government unto the which his ancestors could never attain.”⁴ The *Defence* breaks from tradition by arguing liberty, and not simply religious freedom, is the basis of the struggle.⁵

The *Defence* is also radical in that it holds Philip partially responsible for the troubles in the Low Countries. Previous pamphlets insisted Philip was a principled King whom the Spanish bishops deviously misled. Although the *Defence* initially relies on this traditional depiction, it is abandoned during the discussion of the Tenth and Twentieth Pennies. The Netherlanders’ liberty is under attack from the King himself. The *Defence* insists the provinces have a right to resist the Spanish tyranny. Furthermore, the Germans should assist

³ Martin van Gelderen, ed. “Defence,” *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.

⁴ *Defence*, 66.

⁵ Van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 125.

the Netherlanders because if the Spanish succeed in subjugating the Low Countries, they will attempt to conquer the neighboring Protestant Germany.

Address and Opening to make a good, blessed and general peace in the Netherlands, and to bring them under the obedience of the King, in her old prosperity, bloom and welfare. By way of Supplication.

Orange and the Sea Beggars initiated the armed resistance in 1572. Philip's lack of finances and the German Emperor's urging placed the King under increasing pressure to conclude a peace in the Low Countries. In 1573, Philip appointed Don Luis de Requesens to replace Alva, instructing him to open negotiations with Holland and Zeeland. The talks commenced in 1575 but compromise appeared impossible. The rebels required the Spanish to permit the practice of Protestantism and respect the provinces' rights and privileges.⁶ Not only were these demands denied, Requesens refused to guarantee the States a share in government as he did not recognize the authority of the States. Requesens' sudden death in 1576 "created room for political initiatives and change."⁷ Many perceived it as an opportunity for the States General to take control. One anonymous Netherlander who held this view was inspired to write the *Address and Opening*.

⁶ Israel, 183-4.

⁷ van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 133.

The pamphlet, published in 1576, is a pep talk for the States General. It encourages the States General to initiate peace talks with Holland and Zeeland. According to the *Address and Opening*, Philip's religious placards have pitted the provinces against one another. By causing a civil war, Philip has committed an abuse which warrants the intervention of the States General. The States General represents the people and its purpose is to protect their rights. The *Address and Opening* cites past treaties and charters which entitle the States General to replace an abusive king with a temporary ruler. Philip will either be allowed to resume his rule later or his successor will take the throne.

Furthermore, the pamphlet declares it is the States General duty to intervene on behalf of the Netherlandish people. "For verily, the States, that is the nobles and towns, have...sworn to maintain, for themselves and their descendants unto eternity, all rights and privileges of the country and the common peace and union, in every possible way...."⁸ If Philip is allowed to continue on his present course of action, unchecked by the States General, the Low Countries will be ruined.

The *Address and Opening* advocates declaring an end to the civil war with the Reformed Protestants and concluding a truce which guarantees the security of both religions. The States General must restore peace to the Low Countries. "It is therefore high time for you, my Lords, to wake up from your long sleep and to stand up to remedy this maltreatment,...to use your authority to do away with this harmful war, which has been started against every right and without the consent of the States, and which is being waged

⁸ Martin van Gelderen, ed. "Address and Opening," *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 94.

by the foreign enemies of our fatherland at great costs and to our utter ruin.”⁹ The pamphlet is intended to galvanize the States General into action. Later that year, the dream of the *Address and Opening* was realized with the Pacification of Ghent. The loyal provinces formed a provisional government with Holland and Zeeland headed by a single States General.¹⁰

Brief Discourse on the peace negotiations now taking place at Cologne between the King of Spain and the States of the Netherlands

Another attempt at reconciliation between Spain and the provinces began in May 1579. The peace talks were held in Cologne under the auspices of the German Emperor. The Spanish were uncooperative because they were regaining territory in the southern provinces. Not surprisingly, the Netherlanders rejected their extreme demands.¹¹ During the negotiations, an author who calls himself Gregorie Philerene, Greek for “peace lover”, wrote the *Brief Discourse*. Interestingly, the “peace lover” advises the States General to abandon the talks.

Philerene asserts there is no possibility of compromise between the King and the States. The practice of the Reformed religion is a case in point. According to the Philerene, most Netherlanders are Reformed Protestants. As representatives of the people, the States must secure the practice of the Reformed religion in Holland and Zeeland. However, in the Cologne peace proposal, the King of Spain “explicitly declares that he wants to have the

⁹ *Address and Opening*, 102.

¹⁰ Israel, 186.

¹¹ Parker, 195.

Roman religion maintained to the exclusion of every other one.”¹² Philip refuses to allow Protestantism in the Low Countries.

The *Brief Discourse*, similarly to the *Defence*, contends liberty is the essential issue. It is the States General’s duty to maintain the liberty of the provinces. It has made every attempt to negotiate a peace without forfeiting the liberty of the country. At Cologne, “conditions are proposed on part of the King, which the States cannot accept in any way. On their part, however, only conditions necessary for the preservation of the liberty of the country have been demanded. Nonetheless, their humble requests and supplications have borne no fruit at all.”¹³ Philip’s determination to bring the Low Countries into eternal servitude is demonstrated by his refusal to guarantee their liberty. Clearly, the negotiations offer no hope for peace. Philereene declares the States General must abandon the peace talks at Cologne.

The Netherlands must also abandon Philip. Philereene contends the States General has the right to resist Philip by force. His argument (which is discussed in Chapter Three) is based on the relationship between the prince and the States General. He writes, “it is clear enough that the States are authorized to take up arms against the Princes who exceed the limits of their office with open tyranny.”¹⁴ Philereene further reasons that the States have the right to abjure and replace Philip.

¹² Martin van Gelderen, ed. “Brief Discourse,” *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 155.

¹³ *Brief Discourse*, 157.

¹⁴ *Brief Discourse*, 136.

The *Brief Discourse* advises the States General to abandon the talks with Spain and reject Philip's authority. According to Philerene, the Spanish were successfully undermining the unity of the provinces. He insists instead of allowing the Spanish to divide and conquer them, the provinces should unite against the Spanish. For Philerene, reconciliation with the King was no longer an option. Historians agree that the failure of the peace talks brought the middle road to a dead end. "The States General now had to choose between abject surrender on the king's terms and outright rejection of his authority."¹⁵ The official renunciation of Philip's authority was just around the corner.

*An Apologie or Defense of my Lord, the Prince of Orange, Count of Nasau,
Katzenelnbogen, Diez, Vianden etc Burggrave of Antwerp and Viscount of Besancon,
Baron of Breda, Diest, Grimbergen, Arlay, Nozerboy etc Lord of Chateaubelin etc.
Lieutenant General in the Low Countries and Governor of Brabant, Holland, Zeeland,
Utrecht and Friesland and Admiral, etc.*

Philip's Edict of Proscription was published in 1579. It offered a reward of 25,000 crowns to the person who delivered Orange to Philip, dead or alive. The edict declared Orange "the chief troublemaker of our state" as well as the "public plague of Christendom."¹⁶ These accusations reflect the general understanding that Orange was the head of the Revolt.

¹⁵ Parker, 197.

¹⁶ Duke, 3.

In addition to blaming him for the troubles in the Low Countries, Philip accused Orange of bigamy and claimed he was a foreigner and a hypocrite.

The *Apologie*, published in 1580, is a response to the edict. Loyseleur de Villiers, Orange's court chaplain wrote the *Apologie* under the prince's direct supervision.¹⁷ Although it is officially addressed to the States General, the *Apologie* was printed in four languages as it was also intended for 'the Kings and rulers of Christendom.' Like the edict, it is a hostile piece of political propaganda. It refutes the charges made against Orange and assaults Philip's character, accusing him of adultery, incest and murder. The *Apologie* also holds Philip, and not his ministers, directly responsible for the evils of the Spanish tyranny.¹⁸ However, the Spanish, a traditional target for pamphlets, are not spared. According to the *Apologie*, they have, "cruel, covetous and proud dispositions..."¹⁹ Alva in particular, "has been nourished and brought up from childhood with an irreconcilable hatred against this country, which no matter how much blood he spilled, could never be satisfied."²⁰

According to the *Apologie*, Philip has injured the Low Countries on many counts. He has violated all the terms of the oath he swore when he ascended the throne. In particular, he ignores the authority of the States General and he allowed Alva to oppress the Low Countries. Moreover, Philip supported the Inquisition which would allow the Spanish to rule over men's consciences. The *Apologie* maintains Orange disapproves of persecution and is 'inclined' towards the Protestant faith. It was the ruthlessness of the Inquisition which

¹⁷ van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 151.

¹⁸ Duke, 6.

¹⁹ *Apologie*, 33.

²⁰ *Apologie*, 56.

impelled Orange to “help drive those Spanish vermin from the country.”²¹ Philip’s actions reveal he plans to crush the provinces. The *Apologie* claims the Low Countries are justified in overthrowing the King of Spain.

Political Education

Containing various and very important proofs, founded on God’s Word, and on authorities of pagan authors, which demonstrate forcefully that not without cause and very good motives, His Excellency and the States General of the united Netherlands request to forsake by means of a new oath the King of Spain and his adherents, and to promise, against him, Homage and Fidelity to the present Government, the Country and one another, because of which this Oath should be taken and solemnized by each one
(wishing to be a good Patriot)

In 1581, the States General officially repudiated Philip’s authority with the Act of Abjuration. The legislation required all office holders, magistrates and members of civic militias to take a new oath.²² Those who swore the oath renounced Philip, promised loyalty and obedience to the United Netherlands and vowed to render the States assistance against the King of Spain, his adherents and all other enemies of the country. The following year, with

²¹ *Apologie*, 38.

²² *Israel*, 209.

an abundance of biblical and classical references, the *Political Education* demonstrated its support for this legislation.

The *Political Education* asserts the States General was perfectly within its right to forsake Philip. The pamphlet insists a king is subject to the laws of the country. Because he broke the laws, Philip is a tyrant. The *Political Education* argues it is acceptable to take up arms against an abusive government. The States General is justified in repudiating Philip's authority because he was a tyrant.

The *Political Education* maintains the United Provinces will become consolidated and strong if all Netherlanders take the oath. The States General will be able to take a firmer stance. The *Political Education* states, "the government will know what it has to do against the King of Spain and his adherents, when the people and subjects are of one mind in confronting public enmity, even though they still differ in religion."²³ The reassurance will also inspire men who previously feared the power of the King to fight bravely. Moreover, the oath will distinguish between reliable and untrustworthy men. "For if they no longer thought to favor the King more than their fatherland, they would not object to taking the oath."²⁴ A disavowal of loyalty to Philip will pose no problem for a true patriot. The pamphleteer claims swearing the oath will facilitate the Netherlanders' struggle against the King. As the *Political Education* demonstrates, forming a united front against the Spanish was becoming more important to the United Provinces than asserting its right to resistance.

²³ Martin van Gelderen, ed. "Political Education," *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177.

²⁴ *Political Education*, 178.

Short Exposition
of the right exercised from all old times by the Knighthood, Nobles and Towns of
Holland and Westvriesland for the maintenance of the liberties, rights, privileges and
laudable customs of the country.

The States General granted Leicester the powers of Governor-General in 1586. From the start, he resented the constraints placed on him and Leicester and his supporters soon aimed to create a more centralized government. There was evidence that they wished to pass reforms which would limit the autonomy of the provincial States. When Leicester temporarily returned to England, the States General set about dismantling his government. This caused one of its English members, Sir Thomas Wilkes, to pen an important remonstrance.

Wilkes, influenced by Bodin's theory of popular sovereignty, argued that in the absence of a prince, the sovereignty of the country lay with the people. The fact that the people restrict the authority of the States proves they do not possess sovereignty. Sovereignty is "limited neither in power nor in time."²⁵ The States were "only servants, ministers, and deputies of the commonalty."²⁶ The people granted Leicester the authority to guard their sovereignty via the States General. Only the people or Leicester could revoke this authority.²⁷

This was a serious attack on the authority of the States General and they answered with the *Short Exposition*. Francis Vranck, the town pensionary of Gouda,²⁸ wrote the

²⁵ Thomas Wilkes, "Remonstrance to the States General and the States of Holland," Texts Concerning the Dutch Revolt ed. E. H. Kossman and A. F. Mellink (Cambridge University Press, 1974), 273.

²⁶ *Remonstrance*, 273.

²⁷ Parker, 243.

²⁸ van Gelderen, Dutch Revolt, xxviii.

pamphlet on behalf of the States General in 1587. In his opinion, the sovereignty of the States and the sovereignty of the people are the same. The States are composed of delegates who represent the people. With a historical account, Vranck demonstrates the States have possessed sovereignty for the past eight centuries and have often entrusted it to regents. Counts and countesses were “lawfully charged and commissioned with the rule and sovereignty of these Countries by the nobles and towns, representing the States of the aforesaid Country.”²⁹ Rulers govern only with the approval and consent of the States. The States are servants to the people but they are nonetheless important as they administer sovereignty. Vranck affirms “in all matters the sovereignty of the country is with the States.”³⁰ The *Short Exposition* became a foundation for Dutch constitutional thought.

²⁹ Martin van Gelderen, ed. “Short Exposition,” The Dutch Revolt (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 230.

³⁰ *Short Exposition*, 238.

Chapter Three: Political Justifications

Initially, the rebelling Netherlanders did not intend to challenge the traditional framework of government in the Low Countries. They accepted Philip's role as sovereign and their role as subjects. However, the pamphlets demonstrate that Netherlanders had certain expectations of their king. He was expected to look after his welfare of his subjects. According to the *Address and Opening*, the king should act as a "father to the fatherland."¹ The pamphlet argues that the king has a paternalistic relationship with his people. The king should base his decisions on the interests of his country and not on his personal interests. The *Political Education*, quoting Seneca, states, "the sole end of the government consists in the welfare and prosperity of its community and subjects."² According to the pamphleteers, a ruler is a caretaker.

In addition to preserving their welfare, the king was expected to maintain the Netherlanders' liberty. Although the people of the Low Countries believed they should obey their monarch, they did not believe the monarch had the right to oppress them. The Netherlanders insisted they had 'rights and privileges' which guaranteed their liberty. Each province and town had its own set of privileges which were often recorded in charters and treaties. These constitutional documents established a code of justice by placing constraints on the monarch's power as well as on the conduct of the locally chosen administrators. According to J. J. Woltjer, "Such provisions safeguarded an administration of justice that

¹ *Address and Opening*, 85.

² *Political Education*, 184.

would be consistent with tradition and correspond to locally acceptable standards.”³ When he inherited the throne, Philip swore an oath, promising the Netherlands he would uphold the privileges. Thus, Philip was legally bound to respect the Netherlands’ rights and privileges.

Each province had a States which was responsible for maintaining its rights and privileges. Although the particular rights and privileges of each province varied, they were all intended to ensure justice. Because the provincial States shared a common purpose, their delegates also assembled together in the States General. Often a province’s privileges were locked away in trunks and in Orange’s opinion the vitality of the Netherlands’ liberty was guaranteed by the States. “For what good are privileges on fine parchment in a chest to the people, if those privileges are not maintained by means of the States so that they can feel the effects?”⁴ The States General was perceived as a counterbalance to central authority. It is, “ordained in the name of the community to ensure that the rights and freedoms of the country in all their aspects, and the common peace, are properly and faithfully upheld and that the Lord of the country nowhere exceeds his prescribed limits.”⁵ The *Address and Opening* contends the States General has the authority to protect the Netherlands’ privileges from the king himself. The States General was the guarantor of liberty in the Low Countries.

The policies of the central government were carried out in towns and provinces as the local administrators deemed just. Although only a minority of Netherlands were Protestant,

³ J. J. Woltjer, “Dutch Privileges, Real and Imaginary,” *Britain and the Netherlands*, v. 5: Some Political Mythologies, eds. Bromley, J. S. and Kossman, E. H. (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1975), 22.

⁴ *Apologie*, 57.

⁵ *Address and Opening*, 93.

many people regarded Philip's religious policies as unnecessarily harsh. The rights and privileges allowed local magistrates to mitigate the severity of the edicts. Invoking the privileges was a nonconfrontational manner of circumventing official policy.⁶ After the violent Protestant upsurge of 1566, Philip installed the Duke of Alva as Governor-General of the Low Countries. The 'Iron Duke' came down hard on the Netherlanders and supplanted their established courts with his 'Blood Council'. Alva punished people who had participated in the uprising as well as the magistrates who had granted Protestants concessions. Thousands of men and women were sentenced to death. Netherlanders were outraged at Alva's perversion of justice. The *Political Education* argues that it was known to everyone how the king's government persecuted

those who had the slightest dealings with the affair; how a Blood Council was set up in contravention of the Privileges of Towns and Countries...in order to complete their affairs and to exercise tyranny even better (so that nothing would remain unpunished that the ordinary and provincial councils might have condoned); how the latter, in contravention of all laws, were expressly forbidden to examine any affairs concerning the troubles, or anything connected with them.⁷

Netherlanders regarded the executions of the Counts of Egmont and Hoorne as particularly inequitable. The two esteemed nobles had helped Margaret of Parma restore order in 1567. According to the *Defence*, Alva "constrained the chief Princes contrary to the authority of the laws, to the liberty of the privileges,...to plead their cause in chains."⁸ The

⁶ Woltjer, 23-4.

⁷ *Political Education*, 198.

⁸ *Defence*, 57.

counts were executed in 1568. The *Brief Discourse* argues the King of Spain revoked all the privileges when he “had an infinite number of men tracked down and killed, even the principal Lords of the country....”⁹ Orange also insists Hoorne and Egmont were executed, “without regard, either for their innocence or for the privileges of the country and yet nothing was done except on the orders of the king.”¹⁰ Alva’s inhumanity defied the Low Countries’ traditional system of justice, and the Netherlands argued Alva had therefore violated their rights and privileges.

Not only did the Spanish government trample on the people’s privileges, it also refused to recognize the authority of the States General. According to the *Defence*, the Compromise of 1566 was not only a petition to end the religious persecution. The lesser nobles also beseeched Philip to reconvene the States General which he had not summoned since 1559.¹¹ They requested “that there might be some lawful assembly of the estates or Parliament held for the good government of the commonwealth.”¹² By refusing to convene the States General, the king denied his people the say in the government they had come to expect. The *Short Exposition* compares Philip with his father, “(although in many respects liberty was greatly reduced during the rule of the House of Burgundy) [Charles V] always deeply respected the States of the country, as he easily noticed that his states could be assured by no other means. Then he tried with various admonitions, to bring his son, the King of Spain, to the same consideration and discretion, expressly declaring that Philip would see his

⁹ *Brief Discourse*, 140.

¹⁰ *Apologie*, 56.

¹¹ *Israel*, 166.

¹² *Defence*, 50.

state in peril as soon as he came to deprecate the States in these countries.”¹³ Vranck argues that since people perceived the States General as the guarantor of liberty, they considered any effort to limit the States General’s jurisdiction to be an assault on their liberty.

The States retained one power which even Alva was compelled to respect. Philip’s oath required him to receive the States General’s approval before issuing taxes. In 1569, Alva summoned the States and presented them with the Tenth Penny, a permanent ten percent sales tax. Acquiescing to the tax would have been suicidal for the States General; with a fixed revenue, the Spanish government would have no longer required the service of the States. Alva forced the tax through by manipulating negotiations and claiming the States approved the heavy tax. However, resistance to the Tenth Penny was so widespread that the tax was rarely paid.¹⁴

The violation of Netherlanders’ fiscal rights did not go unnoticed by the pamphleteers. The *Political Education* declares the Spaniards attempted to impose the Tenth Penny, “by force in spite of the various remonstrances on this issue, which argued that this could not be put into practice and could not take place without the consent of the States General of the country.”¹⁵ The fiasco with the tax reinforced the Netherlanders’ fear that the Spanish aimed to render the States General ineffective. If the States were put out of commission, the Netherlanders’ rights and privileges would be jeopardized.

The *Brief Discourse* states Alva wanted to levy the Tenth Penny “not only without the advice and consent of the States, and also against their will and express protest, not just

¹³ *Short Exposition*, 232.

¹⁴ *Israel*, 166-7.

¹⁵ *Political Education*, 200.

for a defined period but in perpetuity, to the effect that the late first Bishop of Antwerp and others boasted of having found a fountain of subsidies, which would flow forever.”¹⁶ As this statement suggests, the Netherlanders believed Alva would use the tax to siphon the Low Countries’ wealth off to Spain. The *Address and Opening* also accuses the Spanish of intending “to impoverish this country and to strip it of all its plenty, welfare and commerce, so that they can do with it as they like.”¹⁷ The Netherlanders feared that the Spanish intended to take advantage of them.

In fact, the pamphleteers assumed Philip’s continual violation of their rights and privileges was part of an elaborate scheme to weaken the Low Countries. Because he planned to exploit the provinces, the *Defence* argues, he deliberately wrought turmoil in the Low Countries. The king aims to bring the Netherlanders “to full obedience and subjection, and reduce the state into that form of and order of government unto the which his ancestors could never attain. The which to bring to pass, the king has vehemently desired of long time....”¹⁸ The *Apologie* perpetuates this belief by informing its readers, “[Philip] has always cherished in his heart the desire to subject you to a simple and absolute bondage, which they call, *complete obedience*. They would deprive you altogether of your ancient privileges and liberties....”¹⁹ The *Political Education* claims Philip’s Spanish counselors, filled with hatred for the nobility and inhabitants of the Low Countries, wished to usurp the States General’s power for themselves. The king heeded their advice to ignore his oath to the provinces and

¹⁶ *Brief Discourse*, 144.

¹⁷ *Address and Opening*, 118.

¹⁸ *Defence*, 66.

¹⁹ *Apologie*, 34.

“sought by all means to take away the ancient freedom from these Countries and to bring them into a miserable slavery under the government of the Spanish bloodhounds.”²⁰

The pamphleteers argue his determination to oppress the Low Countries demonstrates Philip is guilty of tyranny. The *Defence* argues that although the king viewed the Protestant uprising of 1566 as an affront, it does not license him to oppress his subjects. “But let it be so that they were rebels, is it lawful therefore for the king to violate his faithful promise... with this unaccustomed tyranny?”²¹ According to the *Brief Discourse*, Philip offered to withdraw the Spanish antagonists from the government at the Cologne peace talks. Philereene, however, declares this is insufficient, as “the evil proceeds... from the bad and tyrannical laws.”²² The *Political Education* insists Philip is “a complete and well-made tyrant.”²³ Although the earlier pamphlets’ denunciations are subtly phrased, all the writers contend Philip is a tyrant.

In order to ensure the people’s liberty, the provinces’ rights and privileges contain clauses which allow the Netherlanders to reject tyranny. The pamphleteers insist the privileges invest the States General, the guarantors of the constitutional documents, with the authority to resist a tyrant. One such provision was included in the Joyous Entry of Brabant. It maintained if the Duke of Brabant (one of Philip’s titles) violated the province’s rights and privileges, the States were authorized to temporarily renounce his rule. The *Defence* explains that the clause of disobedience is applicable in the current crisis because the Joyous Entry was part of the oath Philip swore when he ascended the throne. The pamphlet asserts, “he

²⁰ *Political Education*, 205.

²¹ *Defence*, 63.

²² *Brief Discourse*, 161.

²³ *Political Education*, 191.

concluded that if he shall do or suffer to be done anything contrary to [the aforementioned] oath and promise, he desired forthwith his subjects to be free from their oath and loyalty, until such time that he shall fully make them satisfaction in that point and in all other matters according to his promise.”²⁴ Philip’s tyranny has dissolved the bond between himself and his subjects.

The *Address and Opening* emphasizes the Joyous Entry of Brabant as well. According to this pamphlet, the treaty also stated a successor required the approval of the States before he could begin his rule. Moreover, at the Council of Kortenberg, circa 1420, Duke John and the States revised the pact. In addition to permitting the States to temporarily divest an abusive ruler of his authority, the Charter of Kortenberg granted the States the authority to replace him with a regent until the duke mended his ways.²⁵ The *Address and Opening* contends the States of the country, “are entitled by right and by oath to maintain the privileges of the country and the common peace, and to uphold them against everybody, whatever the issue may be....”²⁶ The States General, as the guardian of rights and privileges, has the authority to monitor the King’s rule.

Orange, in the *Apologie*, also refers to the Joyous Entry and reminds the States General that in Brabant, “among other rights we have this privilege: we stand in the same relation to our Dukes as the Ephors at Sparta stood to their Kings, that is to keep the kingdom securely in the hand of a good prince, and to bring whoever breaks his oath to his

²⁴ *Defence*, 51.

²⁵ *Address and Opening*, 94.

²⁶ *Address and Opening*, 96-7.

senses.”²⁷ Although the clause of disobedience is only temporary, Orange declares the Netherlanders have endured enough cruelty to justify renouncing the Spanish throne once and for all.²⁸

Both the *Address and Opening* and the *Apologie* stress that the States are obliged to resist Philip. By allowing Philip to continue his tyranny, the States are “notoriously breaking and violating their oath and bounden duty.”²⁹ Orange also claims the States General is “in duty bound”³⁰ to take action. Because it is a representative body, the States General’s policies must be determined by the people. The organization cannot make independent decisions. The States must oppose a tyrant because its purpose is to protect the people’s liberty. The pamphlets present resistance as a duty instead of a right.

The *Political Education* takes the argument a step further. It maintains that the States of the country and other public persons, “are obliged to take up arms against such a tyrant, and are not only allowed to resist him, but also to offend him and if possible to harm his body and goods.”³¹ The *Political Education* arrives at this radical conclusion by adopting a different line of reasoning than previous pamphlets. Instead of relying on the Joyous Entry’s clause of disobedience to defend the provinces’ right to resistance, it argues the fact that Philip broke the laws is sufficient justification for not only resisting, but abjuring Philip. “The law is a certain knowledge of all divine and human affairs. It should serve both the bad and the good, and must be a guide for a Prince.”³² Because the law is a universal standard of

²⁷ *Apologie*, 47.

²⁸ *Apologie*, 47-8.

²⁹ *Address and Opening*, 99.

³⁰ *Apologie*, 57.

³¹ *Political Education*, 191.

³² *Political Education*, 187.

justice, it is applicable to Philip. He is not above the law because it is distinct from the king. The king, having violated the rights and privileges, is a tyrant and the States has the right to abjure Philip.³³

The *Brief Discourse* and the *Short Exposition* develop another alternate justification for overthrowing Philip. The States' authority is determined by the rights and privileges. The king cannot "make any alterations in the matter of the sovereignty such as levying salt tax or other duties, or minting new coinage, or making peace or waging war, without the express consent of the States."³⁴ The States have the right to resist Philip because he implemented a tax without the States' approval. They have the authority to "take up arms against the Princes who exceed the limits of their office with open tyranny."³⁵ Although the *Brief Discourse* concedes the States are subordinate to the king, it argues they, "have reserved unto themselves the power to decide on all matters concerning the sovereignty."³⁶ There is a suggestion of popular sovereignty in this assertion. The prince is not allowed to infringe upon the Netherlanders' liberty. As the States represent the people, they are the people's means to oppose a tyrant. It is even within the States' jurisdiction to abjure Philip and "take another Prince as Lord of the country...."³⁷ The *Brief Discourse* argues the prince is dependent on the States.³⁸

Vranck extends this argument in the *Short Exposition*. He maintains the people, and not the king, possess sovereignty. As the States represent the people, this sovereignty is

³³ van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 157-160.

³⁴ *Brief Discourse*, 136.

³⁵ *Brief Discourse*, 136.

³⁶ *Brief Discourse*, 138.

³⁷ *Brief Discourse*, 139.

³⁸ van Gelderen, *Political Thought*, 144-5.

conferred onto them. Vranck's evidence is that a king's rule was subject to the approval of the Netherlanders, as represented by the States. They had the authority to "admonish the Prince to maintain their liberty and welfare in the name of all the members, but could also offer opposition with the means of the country, should the Princes be lured into tyranny."³⁹ Philip's self-interest placed the commonwealth of the people in jeopardy. Vranck claims, "with the violence of Spanish and other foreign soldiers, he forced these countries to act in a way that they, as represented by the States, could not endorse."⁴⁰ Because Philip disregarded their privileges, the people decided to abjure him.

The basis for the pamphleteers' assertion that the Netherlanders were justified in resisting Philip evolved from the *Defence*'s appeal to the clause of disobedience to Vranck's contention that the States possess sovereignty. However, the privileges are at the center of all the arguments. The Netherlanders' main political justification for the Revolt was that they were restoring their rights and privileges.

However, the Netherlanders had been inconsistent in demanding the restoration of their privileges. For example, under Charles V, the privileges of Delft were suspended in order to appoint a magistrate. The town council, divided between two opposing camps, had been unable to nominate one. Apparently, Delft's inhabitants excused the central government's intervention because it coincided with their sense of justice.⁴¹ Although there were previous instances when the privileges had been violated, it was not until Alva provoked the Low Countries that the Netherlanders became adamant about maintaining their rights. At

³⁹ *Short Exposition*, 233.

⁴⁰ *Short Exposition*, 232.

⁴¹ Woltjer, 25.

the Cologne peace talks, the States General explained privileges did not have to be rigidly upheld as long as the sovereign and his government were fair and “treated their subjects with humanity, goodwill and moderation.”⁴² According to Woltjer, “the privileges were a weapon in the struggle, not the main objective.”⁴³ The rebels used the notion of rights and privileges to defend their efforts to create a more just society.

Although the constitutional documents played a prominent role in justifying the resistance and eventual abjuration of Philip, their contents were often unknown. In 1575, Orange authorized the States of Holland to search the castle of Gouda for their rights and privileges. Most of the documents were either illegible or were missing. The search committee found nothing, “pertaining to any freedom or right of the county of Holland.”⁴⁴ Because the contents of the privileges were often unknown, the pamphleteers were not bound by precise definitions of their privileges. Their vague character allowed the pamphleteers to continually reinterpret their rights. Even if all the privileges had survived, they would not have insisted that a prince is subject to the law or asserted that the States possess sovereignty. “In the ultimate defense of the abjuration, the specificities and constitutional limits of the privileges were transcended and absorbed into the articulation of the right of resistance as a fundamental principle of politics.”⁴⁵ Eventually, the power the pamphleteers bestowed on the rights and privileges outstripped the authority that past governments had intended for the documents. Resistance and abjuration became privileges in their own right.

⁴² Woltjer, 26.

⁴³ Woltjer, 26.

⁴⁴ Woltjer, 19-20.

⁴⁵ van Gelderen, Political Thought, 162.



The Iconoclasm

Etching, ca 1570. Frans Hogenberg.

Tanis, James and Horst, Daniel. *Images of Discord*, Grand Rapids: Bryn Mawr College Library, 1993.

Chapter Four: Religious Justifications

The controversy over religion was undoubtedly a significant factor in the Revolt. The large amount of attention religious concerns receive in the pamphlets reflects its importance. However, the pamphleteers' religious arguments are more delicate than their political ones. The writers are less willing to level explicit accusations against Philip. Nonetheless, the pamphleteers make it clear that Philip's religious oppression cannot be endured.

Although Protestants were a minority in the Low Countries, most of the pamphleteers appear to be Protestant. For instance, Philerene cites that German princes regard the Reformed religion "as founded upon the Holy Scriptures and command of God, whereas the Roman religion is founded upon the authority of the Pope of Rome and the opinions of men."¹ This is a general Protestant criticism of the Roman Catholic church's reliance upon the clergy. Protestants maintain that direct, active conversation with God is more desirable than the Catholic's route through a priest. This line of reasoning results in the Protestant tenet that faith is of central importance. The author of the *Defence* declares Reformed Protestants in the Low Countries, himself included, "not only embrace the only word of God, but also out of that word take the form of our faith, and all things which we use in our religion."² The author of the *Political Education* similarly displays his Protestant sentiments by stating, "the Apostle Paul rightly argues in the second chapter to the Ephesians that faith is a gift of God."³

¹ *Brief Discourse*, 140.

² *Brief Discourse*, 76.

³ *Political Education*, 195.

The *Apologie* includes a section entitled 'Orange's Inclination towards the Reformed Religion'. Within this segment, Orange states Philip has referred to Reformed Protestantism as 'the Religion'. Philip's use of the term was intended as an insult but Orange insists that this is the correct term, "since indeed she alone deserves this name by virtue of her excellence; this acknowledgment and this truth has been rung from his lips because of the great strength and power of its truth."⁴ Orange affirms that Reformed Protestant is the true religion.

The author of the *Address and Opening*, however, is Catholic. Despite his religious belief, he defends the Reformed religion. For instance, he argues that the accusations made against Luther and others at the Diet of Worms were untrue.⁵ He is as offended by Philip's policies of anti-heresy as the Protestants.

Although they do not all share the same religion, the pamphleteers do agree on the nature of man. They contend a man consists of two parts: the body and the soul. Reason and intellect, the faculties which distinguish man from other animals, are associated with the soul. This belief is reflected in the *Political Education*'s statement that a man is composed of, "a reasonable soul and an earthly body."⁶ Furthermore, a man's conscience, which determines his morals, is part of his soul. His conscience enables man to distinguish between right and wrong, to analyze opposing arguments and decide which is best. A man's conscience is therefore responsible for his choice of religion. The *Address and Opening* explains that

⁴ *Apologie*, 37.

⁵ *Address and Opening*, 100.

⁶ *Political Education*, 207.

“nature teaches, reason testifies and experience shows that religion and the service of God exist in the conscience....”⁷

Because religious beliefs are determined by a man’s conscience, Philip’s resolve to impose Roman Catholicism is described as an effort to suppress his subjects’ consciences. According to the *Defence*, the Netherlands hoped that Philip would mitigate his father’s religious edicts and release them from the yoke of the Inquisition. To their dismay, Philip not only adopted his father’s views on religion, but he made even more of an effort to halt the advance of Protestantism and transform the Low Countries into a Catholic stronghold. The *Defence* claimed Philip’s harsh religious policy authorized the Inquisitors to “spoil poor men of their goods and cruelly torment their conscience.”⁸ Philerene agrees that the king was determined to force the Netherlands “to act against their consciences.”⁹

The plan to reorganize the bishoprics in the Low Countries was one policy with which Philip prevented the inhabitants from choosing their own religion. Orange argues anyone who “hated the torturing of men’s consciences”¹⁰ objected to the scheme. “This entire project had no other purpose than to establish the cruel Spanish Inquisition and the said bishops as inquisitors, burners of bodies and tyrants over consciences.”¹¹ As the *Apologie* suggests, the pamphleteers were especially disturbed by the Inquisitors’ use of violence. The *Political Education* claims anyone who disobeyed the pope and his adherents was executed.¹² Philip

⁷ *Address and Opening*, 119.

⁸ *Defence*, 23.

⁹ *Brief Discourse*, 146.

¹⁰ *Apologie*, 58.

¹¹ *Apologie*, 58.

¹² *Political Education*, 195.

was savage in his determination “to suppress the consciences of [his] subjects.”¹³ The pamphleteers argue Philip was willing to enforce Roman Catholicism in the provinces.

The pamphleteers argue however that Philip does not have the authority to govern the Netherlands’ consciences. They insist that although God commissioned kings to rule over earthly, bodily matters, He reserved sovereignty over their consciences and soul for Himself. The *Brief Discourse* states “each individual must answer before God for his faith and conscience.”¹⁴ The *Address and Opening* shares the conviction that “God is the punisher of consciences.”¹⁵ Although God granted kings authority over their people and their property, their consciences remained independent of another man’s rule. According to the pamphleteers, the Netherlands were entitled to freedom of conscience.

By attempting to govern the consciences of the inhabitants of the Low Countries, Philip is interfering in God’s domain. According to the *Brief Discourse*, he attempts to “oppress not only their body and goods, but also their consciences and souls.”¹⁶ The *Defence* declares the Spaniard, “does whatsoever pleases him, though it be contrary to the laws of God and man.”¹⁷ The pamphlets imply Philip is flagrantly disobeying God by meddling with his subjects’ consciences. The *Political Education* argues Philip, “could not forbid the subjects to serve God in their conscience following His word and will, for in doing so, he would kill their souls, which is against God and against nature....”¹⁸ Essentially, the pamphleteers argue Philip is rebelling against God.

¹³ *Political Education*, 188.

¹⁴ *Brief Discourse*, 138.

¹⁵ *Address and Opening*, 85.

¹⁶ *Brief Discourse*, 145.

¹⁷ *Defence*, 72.

¹⁸ *Political Education*, 206.

In the opinion of the writers, Philip's disobedience presents the Netherlanders with a dilemma. Because Philip has pitted himself against God, the Netherlanders are forced to choose between them. According to their interpretation, it is impossible to obey both. The *Apologie* declares Orange decided to follow God. Orange claims Philip asked him to execute several people whom the king suspected of practicing Reformed Protestantism. Instead of complying with the order, Orange informed the people of Philip's intentions. He asserts, "I would rather obey God than man."¹⁹

The pamphleteers argue obeying God is the only logical choice. Philereene contends "as far as the salvation of the soul is concerned, one should obey God, not men or Kings."²⁰ The *Political Education* agrees, "one must honour, fear and obey God more than man, for God governs by his own authority, whereas the Kings do not govern but because of God, as is testified by Paul in the thirteenth chapter of the letter to the Romans."²¹ Philip is God's subordinate and the pamphleteers insist the Netherlanders should adhere to the higher authority. The situation is reminiscent of Satan's challenge to God's authority. Although the writers never draw the connection for their readers, it probably would have registered with every sixteenth century reader. The pamphlets implicitly argue the Netherlanders should abandon Philip and follow God.

According to the writers, freedom of conscience entitles the Netherlanders to resist Philip. The author of the *Defence* writes "in most humble wise we do desire that we may have our conscience and Religion left us freely, lest in that last judgment we be found guilty of

¹⁹ *Apologie*, 52.

²⁰ *Brief Discourse*, 138.

²¹ *Political Education*, 191.

violating the faith of Jesus Christ with an ungodly conscience, and that we may by the good licence of the king defend and keep the health of our souls.”²² The pamphlet implores the king to respect the Netherlanders’ right to freedom of conscience. However, The *Defence* also hopes that the Netherlanders will learn to “forsake the judgment of man, and cleave only to the authority of God.”²³ If Philip continues to oppress their souls, the *Defence* threatens the Netherlanders will challenge Philip’s command.

The *Address and Opening*, however, argues Philip will not grant them the Netherlanders their freedom of conscience. “He has decided once and for all to lose all of his kingdoms and countries rather than to permit them the exercise of their religion.”²⁴ The pamphlet insists the provinces should take it upon themselves to end the strife in the Low Countries. He advises the States to arrange a treaty with Holland and Zeeland which temporarily permits the practice of both religions. “We should frankly and freely allow them their religion, as they want to account for it before God, and should make an accord with them that they will not hinder us in our religion, ...as long as and until the moment when a free general council, having heard both parties, may decide and determine something else.”²⁵ The pamphlet assumes a state must have only one religion. Even in Germany, where both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism were practiced, only one religion was selected for each territory. There was no precedent for allowing two religions in a state. According to the

²² *Defence*, 74.

²³ *Brief Discourse*, 76.

²⁴ *Address and Opening*, 119.

²⁵ *Address and Opening*, 120.

Address and Opening, freedom of conscience allows the people have a say in which religion is practiced. ^{but only} It is a collective right, not an individual right.

The *Brief Discourse* modifies the argument given in the *Address and Opening*. The pamphlet also argues reconciliation with Philip is impossible and urges the States to act. The pamphlet concedes that it is preferable to have one religion in a state. However, in the Low Countries, there are too many Protestants. The provinces should tolerate both religions. The *Brief Discourse* asks “seeing the multitude of those who profess a religion other than the Roman, should the States, ... rather allow the King to ruin the country, to chase and massacre the subjects, than to tolerate both religions?”²⁶ The *Brief Discourse* establishes freedom of conscience as an individual right.

Orange strove to establish religious tolerance throughout much of the Revolt. He used his influence as Stadholder of Holland and Zeeland to secure the practice of both religions in the newly conquered provinces. Orange contends he resisted pressures to persecute the Roman Catholics. “When the question arose to destroy some of them, you know the lengths to which I went so that everyone might live in peace, one with another.”²⁷ However, his efforts failed. The States judged that the Catholics were treacherously undermining the Netherlanders’ efforts to drive the Spanish out of the Low Countries. The States of Holland and Zeeland banned Catholicism as an emergency measure. However, the rebel provinces did not harm the Roman Catholics. The practicalities of war did not alter Orange’s stance on

²⁶ *Brief Discourse*, 137.

²⁷ *Apologie*, 50.

religious toleration. He sought to rescue the remaining provinces from the Spanish, allowing “us to live here in peace and quiet possession of our bodies, property and conscience.”²⁸

Although Orange’s opinion had not wavered, the difficulty of realizing religious toleration in an unstable, newly emerging state affected Netherlanders’ views. Many abandoned the theory but even those who retained their belief in religious toleration were discouraged from publicly advocating it.²⁹ The author of the *Political Education* appears to fall into the latter category. The pamphlet clearly endorses freedom of conscience but it advocates secular unity instead of religious toleration. The *Political Education* argues everyone should swear an oath denouncing Philip and promising loyalty to the States because “concord and truthfulness are recommended, while faction, discord and ambiguity are condemned.”³⁰ The critical situation of the provinces impelled the *Political Education* to appeal to concord on a non-religious basis. For the time being, pamphleteers’ suspended their efforts to establish religious toleration in order to concentrate on building their republic.

²⁸ *Apologie*, 38.

²⁹ *Israel*, 372.

³⁰ *Political Education*, 221.



Emblematic Contrast of Orange and Alva

Engraving, ca 1570-1572. Anonymous (Theodoor de Bry?)

Tanis, James and Horst, Daniel. Images of Discord. Grand Rapids: Bryn Mawr College Library, 1993

Conclusion

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, Philip II attempted to consolidate his power in the Low Countries. The Spanish king centralized his government at the expense of local authority and he strengthened the Roman Catholic Church at the expense of Protestantism. His policies outraged the Netherlanders and they revolted against Philip. Pamphleteers were inspired to argue that the inhabitants of the Low Countries had the right to resist Philip.

The pamphleteers contend Philip was the rebel, not the Netherlanders. The writers declared the Netherlanders were entitled to both the liberty guaranteed by their rights and privileges as well as to the liberty of conscience that God granted man. On the one hand, Philip trampled on their rights and privileges and denied them their justice. The pamphleteers argued Philip was rebelling against tradition. On the other hand, Philip attempted to dictate the Netherlanders' religion and to rob them of their consciences. The writers insisted Philip was rebelling against God. Such diabolical tyranny had to be opposed. The pamphleteers maintained the Netherlanders were justified in combating Philip in order to recover justice and freedom of conscience. Essentially, they assert the Revolt was intended to restore liberty.

However, when the pamphleteers articulated these ideas, they developed doctrines which conferred more liberty on the provinces than they had actually experienced in the past. In the realm of politics, the *Political Education* helped protect the Netherlanders from future tyranny by arguing a ruler is subject to the law. The *Brief Discourse* and the *Short Exposition* encouraged the States General to assume sovereignty. In terms of religion, the *Brief Discourse* and the *Apologie* demanded religious toleration. Although

this dream was not immediately realized, the pamphlets' religious arguments ensured freedom of conscience was recognized as a basic right. The pamphlets claim the Netherlands were returning their society to its previous, more equitable state. They were not deterred by the fact that their conception of an ideal society had never really existed.¹ Regardless of the pretense, the Netherlands wanted liberty. With the help of their pamphleteers, they achieved their goal by establishing the Dutch Republic.

¹ Woltjer, 34.

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