

*A discourse upon the permission of freedom of religion, called 'Religions-vrede' in the
Netherlands, 1579*

Introduction: This discourse is attributed to the well-known Huguenot Philip du Plessis Mornay, who stayed in the Netherlands in the autumn of 1578 and together with the court-chaplain Villiers and Marnix of St Aldegonde was one of Orange's chief counsellors. It was written before Don John's death (1 October 1578) but not published until 1579. The author claims to be a Roman Catholic supporter of religious liberty. The text is from E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 163-65.

I ask those who do not want to admit the two religions in this country how they now intend to abolish one of them, I mean the religion which they think is the feeblest. It goes without saying that you cannot abolish any religious practice without using force and taking up arms, and going to war against each other instead of taking up arms in unison against Don John and his adherents and delivering us from the insupportable tyranny of the foreigners. If we intend to ruin the Protestants we will ruin ourselves, as the French did. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that it would be better to live in peace with them, rather than ruin ourselves by internal discord and carry on a hazardous, disastrous, long and difficult war or rather a perpetual and impossible one. Taking everything into consideration, we can choose between two things: we can either allow them to live in peace with us or we can all die together; we can either let them be or, desiring to destroy them, be ourselves destroyed by their ruin. To all appearances in truth in a very different case Samson set about it in the same way as we want to. He was assiduously pursued by the Philistines. These people, on the contrary, although struck down so many times, demand only quiet and freedom from pursuit. He was alone against many, and in his despair could only hope; we are many against one; we have sufficient means to save ourselves, and for us there is no reason why we should lightheartedly seek our own perdition ...

As we cannot forbid these people to practise their religion without starting a war and cannot destroy them by that war without being destroyed ourselves let us conclude that we must let them live in peace and grant them liberty according to the articles of the *Religions-Frid* [the word is German for religious peace and was used as a legal term for this concept in the Netherlands] or such others as may be proposed. For there is certainly a grave danger that if we examine their intentions more carefully those people who pontify at one time about conscience,

and at another time about order, do not have any regard for the Church or the fatherland. They only want to profit at the expense of both Church and fatherland, fearing that if all were unanimous and allied together, they might be called to account for having consumed the people's means of support, and be relieved of the position and rank they hold unworthily and illegally. To avoid the evils which menace them, they can only think of keeping the two parties indissension and discord and thus troubling everything ...

Let us remember that all of us are men, Christians, people who love, ourselves, the church and the fatherland, who believe in one God, profess one Jesus Christ, desire one reformation in this state. As men, let us love; as Christians, let us instruct and support each other. We ruin ourselves by war and internal discord. As lovers of ourselves and of what concerns us, let us demand peace and union. The Church ruins itself when war makes us, instead of Christians, people who despise all religion. Let us stop debating and fighting and in tears turn back to God, beseeching Him to re-establish religion among us to His glory. In this country there are now two religions. If both may not be professed freely, we will surely make war upon each other. If this should happen, the country will be laid waste and we will lose everything. Let us then live in peace with each other, let us help each other to drive away the Spaniards and their adherents and let us come so close to each other that nothing will ever divide us. Let all of us, seigniors, nobles, clergymen, merchants, peasants, agree to demand the promulgation of the *Religions-Frid* and its observance, for without it we can only expect confusion, desolation, and total ruin. I pray God Almighty who disposes of all things at His pleasure, that it may please Him in His mercy to grant that all inhabitants of these Netherlands live together in harmony and in unity.