

*A true narrative and apology of what has happened in the Netherlands in the matter of religion in the year 1566. By those who profess the reformed religion in that country, 1567*

Introduction: This document was written by Philip Marnix of St. Aldegond, who moved within the social circle of the confederate nobles and the Calvinist consistories. The document looks back on the events of 1566 and was published anonymously in 1567. The version below is from E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 78-81.

The final point to be considered is the image-breaking, for which the adherents of the new religion are more severely reproached than for anything else. This is interpreted as an act of public violence and as a seditious act clearly intended to disrupt all political order. In short, some think this fact alone is of such a nature that only the ruin and extermination of the greater part of the subjects can represent sufficient satisfaction for His Majesty. But if those who pass such a judgment and give this advice to His Majesty, were inspired by the desire to see justice prevail and wished to further the public weal rather than their own profit and career, they would give closer attention to how this action came about and who gave the advice and counsel to do it, by whom it was executed, and where the fault that was committed chiefly lies. And then finally they would weigh the evil they think so great, against the difficulties which might arise if their advice were acted upon.

For even if breaking and cutting images is the most enormous and capital crime to be committed or imagined, yet they do not know whom to blame for it. It is still uncertain who the persons were who did it so promptly and it is still more uncertain who advised them to do it. To accuse the ministers, the elders or consistories of the churches or the assemblies of those who adhere to the reformed religion, would be shameless, for no one has ever succeeded in extorting a confession from, the men executed for this crime, in spite of the torments and sufferings inflicted upon them. On the contrary one knows that the adherents of that religion have always been of the opinion that private persons must not cut down images erected by the public authorities. This they declared several times in public exhortations as well as in private remonstrances, always so that no one should be given offence. And no one who ever took the

trouble to study their doctrine can be ignorant of this. But even if they had thought such action justifiable (which is not true at all), it is at all events certain that they never wanted to do it. Moreover, at the time it was done, it was useless to them. They had unanimously decided to send deputies to Brussels to beg Her Highness provisionally to grant them some churches or other public places in which to practise their religion, in order to avoid disturbances and riots. They had great hopes of obtaining this because every one could see that it was the only way to keep the people quiet and tranquil. Would they not damage their cause and fall out of favour with Her Highness, if at the same time they ventured to perform a deed so prejudicial and contrary to their request? Thus it is obvious that they were never of that opinion and intention.

I concede that among the image breakers there were people who professed to be of the religion, but I also say that there were as many others who did not make and never made that profession. In several places one even saw only women and children busily destroying things. In several other places the bishops and priests began to hide their most beautiful rings and the citizens followed suit, thinking that orders had been given to hide whatever might be saved, until the children and street-boys destroyed the rest. In some places the magistrates sent their officers to accomplish the task and they were followed by the common people. Even now one does not know who were the originators. There are, however, strong suspicions and clear indications that it was the priests who started this as a device to set the magistrates against those of the religion (in the past they undoubtedly often did such things to cause new persecutions), as well as to ruin the plan, unanimously accepted by all the churches to send a request to Her Highness. Time was short for the priests and their adherents realised that if the churches' plea were indeed accomplished, their own little schemes would be entirely wrecked. And indeed, after the troubles at Antwerp had died down another riot was instigated by some who forced their way into the Church of Our Lady [the cathedral]. Six of those responsible were apprehended and hanged the day after. There were four papists among them and one of these was a well-known nobleman who had urged the others on. So we have to presume that by means of such a stratagem they tried to wreck the churches' plan. This is proved by later events for, because of this, the request was not presented and those of the religion afterwards met with nothing but disfavour and hatred.

And yet, to tell the whole truth, these events were due not so much to such stratagems,

but to the manifest providence of God who wanted to show how much He detests and abhors the abominable idolatry committed around these images to the disgrace of the name of Christ and the whole of Christendom. He wanted to stigmatise and ridicule the foolish imagination of people who always wish to contrive new ways to honour Him. For people who wanted to go on adoring and serving images contrary to God's commandment, sought excuses similar to those brought forward by the ancient pagans (which Justin, Lactantius, Origen, Augustine and other holy fathers criticised) and declared that they knew very well that the images were only wood and stone, and that they did not adore them but only what was represented by them. Notwithstanding this we see, I say, that the poor people committed and are still committing every day such horrible and abominable idolatries in connection with those statues, that every God-fearing man cannot fail to shudder with horror . . .

And certainly, considering the facts in all their detail, it is easy to see that God Himself intervened to lead the whole action and carry it out and men cannot resist God's power. How else could women, children and men without authority, without arms, in small numbers, for the greater part poor and humble people, pull down and destroy nearly everywhere in the country so many images, altars and church-ornaments in only four or five days? Various master masons assert that even with the help of fifty men they would not have been able to destroy in eight days what a small number of boys destroyed in one or two days in the most famous and bustling towns of the Netherlands, in full view of every one and without meeting with any difficulty or interference.

Who is so blind or so dull that he does not see and understand that the hand and the power of God brought all this about? Of God, I say, who struck the magistrates with stupor and tied their hands, lest they try to prevent His work? Certainly if a sparrow does not fall to the ground without His will and ordination, how can we think that such almost incredible work happened by chance or through the will and diligence of men?