

*A brief discourse sent to King Philip, our prince and sovereign lord, for the interest and profit of His Majesty and in particular of his Netherlands, in which are expounded the means that should be applied to obviate the troubles and commotion about religion and to extirpate the sects and heresies that abound in the Low Countries, 1566*

Introduction: In 1565 a group of mostly young and lesser nobles assembled in Brussels to hold a Protestant religious service. Out of this meeting came a “Compromise” league, which met with Margaret of Parma to demand an easing of the inquisition in order to end the religious troubles. The discourse was written by Francis Junius (Francois Du Jon), a Frenchman by birth, afterwards a university professor at Leiden. He was an officiating Calvinist minister at Antwerp in the years 1565-6. It was drafted at the end of 1565, in close personal consultation with Louis of Nassau, William of Orange's brother. The document is printed in E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of The Netherlands*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 56-59.

As all judicious people agree, no physical violence can rectify faith and inner belief and it is through conscience that people should recognise their errors. We must now pass on to the second point that we have proposed, to wit whether one could not prevent at least the public worship of their religion [viz. Calvinism] by prohibiting them to assemble, to preach, to catechise and to profess openly what they believe in their inmost hearts. And if this should be somehow feasible, whether this is good and necessary.

In fact, can any religion exist without the public worship and ceremonies, by which it is maintained? The emperor Gratian [an Emperor in Rome, 375-83] was right in emphasising that people must be kept under the outward discipline of some religion, whatever it may be, whether good or bad. For, as the nature of man is such that he desires to ease his conscience and to cast off the yoke of God, it is necessary that he should be bridled and kept under discipline, otherwise he will become as a horse that has bolted, indulging in uncurbed licentiousness and rejecting the fear both of God and men.

Thus as we cannot extirpate the faith which these men cherish in their hearts, it is little use (even if it were feasible) preventing them from attending their public worship, and the services by which they are maintained in their religion and in the fear of God and authority. For instead of being taught in their assemblies to be honest people fearing God and respecting the

king and his officers, they would then become vile atheists and libertines stirring up seditions and disturbing order and peace. That this is true, daily experience clearly shows. For today we see a large number of people who have rejected the yoke of obedience to the Roman Church and deride the mass and priests. But for fear of losing their possessions or offices they do not want to attach themselves to the discipline and worship of some other religion and have become absolute atheists without faith and without law. There is even no small number of vile libertines who form separate sects, teaching that one should not serve God outwardly in any form or discipline, but only in spirit and liberty [perhaps Anabaptist sects]. And under this pretext they indulge in every possible villainy and abomination, in murder and plundering, in incest and adultery, thinking that such things do not matter as they merely pertain to the external side of life. What does matter, they claim, is the purity of their hearts. Things have gone so far that some even boast of being Christ, whereas others think they are the Spirit of God, or God's charity. In a word, their impiety is boundless, they despise God and the authorities, asserting that it is wrong to use the sword or to give orders to people, for, they say, it is the spirit that should govern and be allowed to move the heart of man whither it wishes.

It is not difficult to indicate the reasons for this situation. These people see that there are grave abuses in the Church but they are not permitted to adopt any other discipline or religion. In such circumstances they consider it legitimate to conform outwardly to the rules of a Church which they reject provided their hearts are pure. But this amounts to not taking religion seriously at all and inevitably makes them lapse into evil atheism. That there are no more seditious individuals and no greater disturbers of every order in the world than such people, is clearly shown by the example of the Anabaptists in Munster and their likes [a reference to a radical Anabaptist sect that took over Munster in 1534-5]. There is no better means (if one considers the matter without prejudice or passion), to exterminate such heresies than to permit, nay expressly to command that all who profess the religion called reformed or evangelical, assemble openly and keep a strict discipline in accordance with the obedience due to God and the authorities, and correct all vices and licentiousness.

If this is done we shall no longer see new and abominable sects full of sedition and mutiny, and horrible blasphemies against the majesty of God spring up every day. Instead there

will be only two ways of public worship in public sight, each of them keeping to the obedience due to God and the king. Even if there were no other benefit, this would be valuable enough in the maintenance of public order. And as soon as a new opinion arises, it will be very easy to show by the word of God that it is false.

But should some people think it unacceptable to give heretics the liberty to disseminate their heresies, let us now consider whether it is possible to stop them assembling. If we take experience, the perfect counsellor, into account, it will certainly be found that it is indeed possible to prevent them from assembling but absolutely impossible to prevent them from believing what they think to be in keeping with God's word. Have we not seen the late very victorious emperor, Charles, of very blessed memory, possess such great power that it made the world tremble? Have we not seen with what almost incredible ardour he sought to prevent the spread of this religion? Have we not seen the great rigour of his edicts? And what else did he want but to prevent the new religion from being publicised and to make it impossible for the people who profess it to assemble (for he knew quite well he could not convince them completely of their error). Yet he made no progress, in spite of all the prohibitions he issued.

Did he fail because the heretics assembled in some foreign country, where they enjoyed greater liberty? No, on the contrary, all the princes of Christendom, together with the Pope, were determined to exterminate them, and to give them no place where they might find refuge. And yet all this was in vain. How can we possibly think that the power of the king, surely no greater than that of the emperor, could suffice to stop the heretics? For are not France, Germany, England and all the countries around now open to them? They might go there and enjoy the liberty which is denied them here. And are there not now many princes and kings who side with them? Are not their numbers multiplied by a thousand and one? Are not their books read and seen by everyone? Truly those who offer this advice to His Majesty, show beyond question that they have either lost their reason or that they are trying to establish their own grandeur at the expense of the king and to the ruin of the country.