

*Cry of the watchman. A warning to all lovers of the glory of God, the fatherland and its
privileges and freedom, 1578*

Introduction: This document is a fragment from a pamphlet written before the death of Don Juan in October 1578. Don Juan had been appointed the Spanish military leader in the Netherlands at the time of the Spanish Fury [a mutiny of Spanish troops who looted Antwerp and massacred the civilian population in 1576]. The document was translated into Dutch by Peter Dathenus, a Calvinist leader in Ghent in 1578, and criticizes the leading nobles in the Netherlands for being unreliable in the fight with Spain. 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. 157-159.

You know the men who have helped to introduce, establish and execute the duke of Alva's tyranny and who have to the best of their ability supported and strengthened the authority and the violence of the cruel and haughty Spaniards. You know the men who in every one's opinion have brought the ensuing misery and calamities upon you but nevertheless you let them administer your most secret and important affairs. Are you really so simple as to think that they have so quickly turned from wolves into sheep, from tyrants into reasonable and humble rulers, from traitors to the fatherland and enemies to its freedoms into protectors and lovers of the country and its freedoms? Can a fountain give fresh and salt water at the same time? Do you not believe rather, what is the truth too, that they have turned their coats inside out and changed their speech but have kept the same duplicity and malevolence? Do you not see that some of these people who have done much harm and damage to the fatherland have been recently exposed? You may rest assured that there are still many around who await their opportunity for playing if they had not been previously assured that they would be given a warm welcome and be well provided for by the Spaniards after surrendering to them some fortresses or towns through treachery or otherwise or rendering some other important service. You deceive yourselves if you think that either the time or the honour you give them will soften or change their hearts and their wickedness, for in this way you make them the bolder, nay you hand over to them the knife with which to cut your throats. You know those who favour Don John and are able to help him and who secretly further his cause by preventing and restraining what is necessary for the deliverance, peace and prosperity of the fatherland. You know too those who keep clear of the

Spanish tyranny but try to bring you under another one which is as insufferable and unbearable. And on the other hand you have come to know by their deeds those who truly love the fatherland. Why do you not open your mouths so that the bad may be expelled and worthy, capable people take their places, not only in the States and the Council of State but also in the treasury and in all towns where the same measures are required and especially in the Council of War?

For humanly speaking, your ultimate hope lies in improving the command over your army and soldiers in whom you will otherwise be deeply disappointed. For it is precisely the men who are in command there who have always been servants, friends and companions of the Spaniards. To mend and adjust this, what more is required than a firm and irrevocable stand on your part? Do not give in to the delusion that time will blunt the sharp edge and that you must adapt yourselves to circumstances and dissimulate. such words are used by men who are satisfied with the present situation and who have gained their ends or by men who want to betray you. Have you not seen that in France the men who fought against tyranny as champions of a good cause, were almost entirely ruined when they wanted to manoeuvre, to dissimulate and to adapt themselves to circumstances? Have you not witnessed the horrid slaughter in which perished not only those who adapted themselves (as they thought) to the times but also the poor people [a reference to the St. Bartholomew's Eve massacre of French Huguenots]? Thus Almighty God has shown how much such proceedings displease Him, for to want to adapt oneself means to dissimulate, which is nothing but a lie and duplicity which God cannot leave unpunished.

Therefore make up your mind, come to a decision, set seriously to work, discard the wrong, material, human considerations, so that at last you may attain liberty and be free from these torments; Do you think that those whom you have set over you as States will ever seriously endeavour to improve your condition unless you start yourselves? For where did your deliverance begin and who began it? Was it begun by the council of the great and by distinguished men? Did it not rather start through you? Would you not still be in the old enslavement if you had not taken the matter in hand yourselves? Therefore, as God has given His blessing to your initial actions, do not doubt that the end result will be good and blissful too, if you carry on on the same lines. But if you deviate from this course, then I foresee that with your

eyes open you wish to ruin yourselves and to lose all the advantages you have gained. For you can see the misfortunes and the danger very clearly before your eyes and yet do not use or apply the medicine and means which are at hand. Therefore you must restore your system of government to its traditional form and fashion, that is, according to your privileges and freedoms. Of what use will these be to you if they are kept only written on parchment and not put in practice? Why have you borne your arms for so long, suffered such heavy losses and spent so much money? Is it not in order to establish a free, well-ordered and safe state and government? Do you think it possible to attain this end as long as you have at the helm of the ship men who instead of navigating it into the port try to head for the rocks? Do you not see that by such suffering you might easily perish? Who will grieve at the news of your ruin? You despise the means which are sure to bring about your deliverance and do not take advantage of the opportunities God vouchsafes to you.